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JSOU Report 10-3

Afghanistan, COIN, and the Indirect Approach

Henriksen

# Afghanistan, Counterinsurgency, and the Indirect Approach



Thomas H. Henriksen  
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**On the cover.** Special Operations Forces on horseback in Afghanistan during Operation Enduring Freedom. DoD photo.



*Afghanistan,  
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Thomas H. Henriksen

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# Foreword

In exploring Counterinsurgency and the Indirect Approach, Dr. Thomas Henriksen assesses several cases where the United States has employed an Indirect Approach toward achieving strategic objectives, and he suggests where this concept has landed short of expectations. In the cases of Vietnam, Somalia, the Philippines, and other countries, he demonstrates that it is often difficult to fit the Indirect Approach doctrine into such a wide variety of strategic and operational environments. His historical narrative cautions against applying a universal model for an Indirect Approach in counterinsurgency (COIN)—for example, the ill-fated use of Montagnard tribes as surrogates in strike operations beyond their local self-defense missions. Moreover, mutual antagonisms between Montagnard and the South Vietnamese population hampered integration of the highland units into the central government's forces. There were difficulties in accommodating the Montagnard ways to the culture of ethnic Vietnamese. This is similar to the challenges of nation building in Iraq and Afghanistan where differing cultures are attempting to be blended into a working sense of nationhood. Just as the ethnic Vietnamese viewed with alarm the arming and training of the Montagnard people, the integrating of Sunni militias, the Sons of Iraq, into Iraq's security effort was an unpopular step in the eyes of Shia security officials.

In Somalia, the Indirect Approach emphasized the importance of local surrogate forces for campaigns against violent extremist groups. In counterterrorism operations, the Indirect Approach in Somalia consisted of using local warlords to seize or assassinate suspects. While this may be a necessary way of dealing with terrorism in the Horn of Africa, author Henriksen believes that this approach aligned the United States with unsavory figures and offered little for the COIN concept of winning support among the greater Somali population. He also warns that as with Afghanistan, "the American way of COIN shades into rudimentary nation-building to establish government-run social welfare services to mollify intra-national ethnic antagonisms, and to channel political grievances toward the ballot box." The problem with all this is that working with and through the host government becomes nearly impossible when the government is ineffectual.

And doing the basic chores of government for the host country precludes the opportunity for a host nation to truly build the engines of good government.

The Somalia experience also suggests that when the host-nation government lacks political legitimacy it hampers the effectiveness of the Indirect Approach. The use of Ethiopian surrogate forces in Somalia to prop-up the Transitional Federal Government was initially useful, but as Henriksen observes, the strategy embraced the intervention by Ethiopian forces, which alienated the Somalis. U.S. strategy must build on local support, not resort to foreign armies to impose their will on populations.

In the Philippines, our discreet and behind-the-scenes approach to assisting the government has proven successful in helping that government counter insurgency in its southern islands. In a small-scale operation intended to free the American missionary couple, Martin and Gracia Burnham (taken hostage by Abu Sayyaf in 2001), U.S. forces supported the Armed Forces of the Philippines using an Indirect Approach. Later, American special units trained and mentored the Philippine forces, which avoided participation in direct combat missions against insurgents. The many successes in the Philippines are not readily transferable to other armed-conflict zones because of the unique historical, political, and social characteristics enjoyed by the archipelago.

By tracing the use of the Indirect Approach as a concept that undergirds U.S. COIN doctrine today, Henriksen illustrates how the notion of an Indirect Approach as a strategic concept has evolved, or more accurately transmuted, from the classic concept advanced by B. H. Liddell Hart. The observation of trench warfare firsthand energized Hart to produce a post-war book, *Strategy: The Indirect Approach*. By his observations of wars, battles, and engagements throughout history, Hart concluded that rather than attack the enemy directly with one's forces, the forces should be moved to a position of advantage *before* an attack begins, to dislocate the enemy, upset their equilibrium, and reduce the will to fight. The orientation here is upon the enemy force. Today's COIN proponents use the Indirect Approach as a sound technique that conveys a small U.S. footprint, assists a host nation to combat an insurgency, and relies on others to partner with us—a valid and appealing idea because our forces are spread thinly and the threats seem ubiquitous. But the fit is not exact.

In unconventional warfare, surrogate forces who conduct operations are oriented upon the enemy as Hart would suggest. Whether surrogates take a

direct or indirect approach to destroying the enemy is a matter of command decision. By working alongside surrogates, training, mentoring, and supplying them, we are participating in their action against insurgents. Also the idea that draining the swamp (or eliminating the root causes of insurgency) is an indirect approach is also a fuzzy use of the Indirect Approach concept. While the U.S. may be supporting a country's internal defense and development plan, that country's actions are quite direct. That we are supporting the host country for our joint interests does not mean we are taking an indirect approach. Henriksen's analysis of the use of an Indirect Approach in diverse examples is helpful for illustrating how the concept is used today, its problems, and successes.

The Indirect Approach can have a positive effect when applied wisely, but the employment of surrogate forces is more than an economy-of-force measure. The approach to every strategic challenge must accord with our values as a nation, our national interests, and the objectives of our security strategies. It must also be applied in different ways to accord with the local politics, history, and culture. Henriksen makes a significant contribution to our strategic thinking about the Indirect Approach as a concept for counterinsurgency and violent extremist groups. His narrative shows that we need to be prudent when taking the Indirect Approach. He cautions against rote applications; each insurgency is unique and requires a thoughtful and subtle use of the Indirect Approach.

Kenneth H. Poole  
Director, JSOU Strategic Studies Department

## About the Author

**D**r. Tom Henriksen is a senior fellow at the Hoover Institution. Until September 2003, he was the associate director for program development at the Hoover Institution. His other administrative duties included serving as executive secretary of the National Fellows and National Security Affairs Fellows programs, as well as director of the Media Fellows Program. Dr. Henriksen also serves as a senior fellow with the JSOU Strategic Studies Department.

His current research focuses on American foreign policy in the post-Cold War world, international political affairs, and national defense. He specializes in the study of U.S. diplomatic and military courses of action toward terrorist havens, such as Afghanistan, and the so-called rogue states, including North Korea, Iraq, and Iran. He also concentrates on armed and covert interventions abroad.

Dr. Henriksen is the author of *American Power after the Berlin Wall* (Palgrave Macmillan, October 2007). A prior published book is an edited volume on competing visions for U.S. foreign policy, *Foreign Policy for America in the 21st Century: Alternative Perspectives* (Hoover Institution Press, 2001). Other works include *Using Power and Diplomacy to Deal with Rogue States* (Hoover Essays in Public Policy, 1999) and the edited collection *North Korea after Kim IL Sung* (Hoover Institution Press, 1999).

He also authored or edited the following books and monographs: *One Korea? Challenges and Prospects for Reunification* (Hoover Institution Press, 1994); *The New World Order: War, Peace, and Military Preparedness* (Hoover Institution Press, 1992); *Revolution and Counterrevolution: Mozambique's War of Independence* (Greenwood Press, 1983); *The Struggle for Zimbabwe: Battle in the Bush* (Praeger, 1981); *Soviet and Chinese Aid to African Nations* (Praeger, 1980); and *Mozambique: A History* (Rex Collings, 1978).

Additionally, he has written numerous journal articles and newspaper essays concerning international politics and security as well as U.S. policy toward rogue states in the post-Cold War era. Dr. Henriksen has also received research grants from the American Philosophical Society, State University of New York, National Endowment for the Humanities, and National Defense Foreign Language Fellowship Program. His book *Mozambique: A History* was chosen for the Outstanding Book Award for

African History by Choice. During 1982, he traveled to the former Soviet Union as a member of the forum for the U.S.-Soviet dialogue.

Dr. Henriksen's education and public service developed in the 1960s, specifically earning his B.A. in History from Virginia Military Institute (1962) and the M.A. and Ph.D. in History from Michigan State University (1966 and 1969). He was selected for membership in Phi Alpha Theta—the history honorary society—as a graduate student. During 1963-1965, Dr. Henriksen served as an infantry officer in the U.S. Army. He taught history at the State University of New York from 1969, leaving in 1979 as a full professor. During the 1979-1980 academic year, he was the Susan Louise Dyer Peace Fellow at the Hoover Institution.

Dr. Henriksen's national public service includes participation as a member of the U.S. Army Science Board (1984-1990) and the President's Commission on White House Fellowships (1987-1993). He also received a Certificate of Appreciation for Patriotic Civilian Service from the U.S. Department of the Army in 1990. He is a trustee of the George C. Marshall Foundation.

What follows are other JSOU publications by Dr. Henriksen:

- a. *Dividing Our Enemies* (November 2005)
- b. *The Israeli Approach to Irregular Warfare and Implications for the United States* (February 2007)
- c. *Is Leaving the Middle East a Viable Option?* (January 2008)
- d. *What Really Happened in Northern Ireland's Counterinsurgency: Revision and Revelation* (October 2008).

# Afghanistan, Counterinsurgency, and the Indirect Approach

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Forewarned, let us take the better path. — Virgil, *Aeneid*

One can't fight a militant doctrine with better privies.  
— Bernard Fall, *Last Reflections on a War*

The use of force alone is but temporary. It may subdue for a moment;  
but it does not remove the necessity of subduing again; and a nation  
is not governed, which is perpetually to be conquered.

— Edmund Burke, *Second Speech on Conciliation with America*

America is embarking on a new way of war in Afghanistan and elsewhere in which battlefield restraint, cultural subtleties, and armed nation-building enterprises matter more than destruction of the enemy. These innovations represent a doctrinal break from how the United States historically waged war in its most heroic chapters. The new doctrine relies heavily on the use of indigenous surrogate troops, the goodwill of the local people, societal reconstruction, and the host government's legitimacy, policies, and conduct. These underpinnings of the Indirect Approach, it must be emphasized, often lie beyond Washington's complete control or even limited influence. By working through—and being greatly reliant on—the agency of others, the recently evolved American strategy strives to defeat insurgencies and to deny terrorists safe havens from which to launch destructive attacks against the American people and their interests. Even exponents of the Indirect Approach, however, acknowledge that the strategy can never substitute as an alternative for the United States to ensure its own defense. Yet America cannot directly intervene into every planetary ungoverned space to eliminate terrorist nests from mounting strikes against the United States. The costs in blood, treasure, and moral authority are too steep.

Faced with an expanding registry of under-governed spaces in dysfunctional states around the globe beckoning to local extremist cells or

Al Qaeda-franchised terrorists, the United States urgently needs a strategy to combat the growing threat in an effective and reasonably inexpensive manner. Yemen's roots in the December 2009 attempted terrorist bombing on Northwestern Airlines flight 253 now firmly adds that Arabian Peninsula country to the lengthening roster of terrorist havens. Already, Pakistan, the Philippines, and the Horn of Africa as well as Yemen have drawn much attention from Special Operation Forces (SOF). In low-visibility missions, SOF partnered with indigenous security forces to engage terrorist cells in ways well-suited to our current environment. Direct expeditionary intervention with a large conventional military footprint, accompanied by high-cost state-building undertakings to combat terrorist sanctuaries, will lead to America's exhaustion and insolvency.

The new version of the Indirect Approach borrows heavily from the revamped counterinsurgency (COIN) strategy of the U.S. Army and Marine Corps. Local armies and police are trained in current U.S. population-centric techniques of conducting COIN operations as they partner with American regular units and SOF. Although the Indirect Approach boasts many pluses, it demands substantial societal transformation, massive financial expenditures, and Western-oriented governments to serve as hosts for the attendant nation-building efforts. These requirements spawn troubling caveats and concerns about fighting through the medium of a vastly transfigured political landscape. As Napoleon remarked: "War is a simple art, all a matter of execution."<sup>1</sup> This study of shortcomings and miscalculations is intended to hone the art of indirectly combating insurgent-based terrorism—the only viable strategy for America's active defense. The execution of past U.S. indirect campaigns and their implications for our current operations are the subjects of this monograph so as to better inform its practitioners of pitfalls to be avoided.

The Indirect Approach owes its rebirth to the "surge" tactics employed in the spectacular turnaround in the Iraq War starting in early 2007, although its roots date much further back. To calm the raging Iraqi insurgency, the United States military liberally paid, equipped, protected, and guided Sunni tribal militias, which broke with the Al Qaeda movement in Iraq because of its indiscriminate violence and harsh imposition of draconian religious practices. This central dimension of the Iraqi COIN breakthrough, along with the additional 28,500 combat troops associated with the surge operation, profoundly reshaped U.S. military thinking, as no other event since the

Vietnam War.<sup>2</sup> Thus the Iraqi conflict ushered in an innovative approach now being employed in Afghanistan to replicate the paradigm of enlisting locals to fight the insurgents.<sup>3</sup> In North Africa, the Horn of Africa, and the Philippines the indirect way of war is also in full tilt.

In reality, the U.S. Army and Marine Corps historically have drawn on indigenous auxiliaries from our nation's earliest conflicts. American forces employed variants of surrogate warfare from their frontier battles in the Western plains, the Philippine insurrection, the Nicaraguan incursions, and the Vietnam War. The Iraq War, however, re-catalyzed interest in COIN techniques and in the usage of host-country manpower. Despite the unique complexities of the Iraq "surge," the U.S. Army and Marine Corps plan to rely on the Indirect Approach in Afghanistan (and beyond) by winning over the population to furnish recruits for Afghan security forces, to turn over information about the Taliban insurgents, and to bestow loyalty on a foreign created and sustained central government in Kabul.

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*... the U.S. Army and Marine Corps plan to rely on the Indirect Approach in Afghanistan (and beyond) by winning over the population ...*

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The recent history of similar campaigns should inject a note of circumspection in this new non-Clausewitzian way of war. The 19th-century Prussian military theorist, Carl von Clausewitz, is mostly associated in American minds with the principles of conventional war calling for force-on-force application of massive violence and the utter defeat of the enemy on a battlefield. For over a century, some of his writings influenced generals to see the object of war as simply destruction in detail of adversaries. In reality, Clausewitz has often been misinterpreted; his writings emphasized the psychological aspects of warfare. But U.S. land-warfare officers normally proclaimed in Clausewitzian language "that the road to success was through the unlimited application of force."<sup>4</sup> Their calls for maximum lethality profoundly shaped U.S. military thought for decades. Now, America's ground forces look to another doctrine for subduing insurgency by winning over the population, not simply killing insurgents, which requires larger U.S. troop levels than high-lethality conventional operations.

From privates to generals fighting in the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, the new doctrine has taken root that the Afghan people are to be protected more than the Taliban insurgents killed. Army General Stanley McChrystal, the overall commander of U.S. and NATO forces in the mountainous country,



made his view clear on the new military metrics: “The measure of effectiveness will not be enemy killed. It will be the number of Afghans shielded from violence.”<sup>5</sup> Later, General McChrystal developed this point: “Success in the long term, more importantly, will be when the people of Afghanistan develop trust and faith in their own government and military.”<sup>6</sup> As a force of 4,000 Marines launched a drive to clear the Taliban from Helmand Province in summer 2009, they aimed at the well-being of the citizenry. “It is not simply about killing the enemy but about protecting the population and improving their lives, which will help prohibit the return of the insurgent elements,” said an unidentified senior officer.<sup>7</sup> Army Major General Mike Scaparrotti declared during Operation Khanjar (Sword Strike) initiated in July 2009: “But the fight, essentially, is about the support of the people.”<sup>8</sup>

### **The Ascendancy of the Indirect Approach Doctrine**

The insurgencies in Iraq and Afghanistan have popularized the new American way of war that emphasizes elements of nation building. This freshly minted concept to wage indirect war against militants from Afghanistan, through the Philippines, to the Horn of Africa embodies a prophylactic approach to terrorism. If schoolhouses, clean water wells, hard-packed roads, and medical clinics are built by Americans and staffed by U.S.-trained indigenous peoples, the winning of hearts and minds will protect us from more 9/11 terrorist attacks. People in the world’s peripheries, so the argument goes, will fight extremist movements and deny terrorists safe havens for their nefarious activities, if we help them not only to defeat the insurgents in their midst but also to join the global economy and the world democracies. The Al Qaeda network, the Taliban, and other radical adversaries fight fiercely against these American-led social-reengineering schemes for a globalized planet. Their backward-looking ideology espouses a violent separation from the outside world, not integration into it. In the middle live the bulk of the people who wish a plague upon both houses so as to return to life before the conflict.

The Indirect Approach to insurgency is now the ascendant strategy to confront low-intensity conflict, whether terrorism or insurgency.<sup>9</sup> This Indirect Approach relies on irregular warfare techniques and COIN capabilities to combat violent subversion and to protect the indigenous population. It demands that U.S. and local forces defeat the insurgents and then institute street-level protection followed by indigenous governance along Western

lines. Thus the Indirect Approach has become infused with the new COIN doctrine of re-knitting the political and social fabric in modern form. It exceeds the norms of the Foreign Internal Defense (FID) mission of merely training another nation's military to combat insurgents or even conventional threats. The model is to follow the sequence of "clear, hold, build, and transfer." But the foundation of the new doctrinal arch is the enlistment of indigenous recruits as a surrogate army or police force to engage terrorists or insurgents alongside of, or guided by, American troops, especially SOF. Briefly put, the idea of surrogate warfare is fewer American boots on the ground, a lighter military footprint, and more indigenous soldiers fighting extremists, patrolling their own countryside, and constructing peaceful democratic nations. Building on the foundation, the approach envisions enhanced political governance and economic development of poor regions.

Until recently the Indirect Approach and indeed COIN warfare lingered on the Pentagon sidelines. It was ostracized and demeaned in the windowed E-Ring offices of the top brass in the five-sided defense headquarters. Their occupants wished it away; instead generals planned for the epic force-on-force battles of the 20th century. High-intensity conventional warfare represented a familiar and comfortable choice for regular Army officers, still swayed by the World War II experience.<sup>10</sup> Its journey to the upper wrung of military thinking has been lengthy and arduous.<sup>11</sup>

Arguably, COIN's nadir dates from America's Vietnam War, where its exponents believe it never received a fair hearing from the conventionally minded military chiefs despite ground-level breakthroughs. Shunted aside by the mainstream Army generals, who wanted to fight the war in Southeast Asia with helicopter-borne mobility and formidable firepower, the Pentagon relied on the conventional sweeps and heavy shelling of an elusive enemy in America's most frustrating war.<sup>12</sup> The journey from the Army's establishment of its Special Warfare Center in 1956 to today's application of COIN practices has been anything but smooth. Now the United States Special Operations Command in Tampa, Florida stands as the most uniquely suited to plan and to combat what is viewed as a global insurgency of violent extremism.<sup>13</sup>

Not even a popular and charismatic President John Kennedy could budge the hidebound generalship in the Pentagon to embrace the new realities of fighting unconventional warfare. To the 1962 graduating class of West Point, Kennedy explained:

There is another type of war, new in intensity, ancient in origins—wars by guerrillas, subversion, insurgents, assassins; wars by ambush instead of by [conventional] combat.... It requires... a whole new kind of strategy, a wholly different kind of force, and therefore a new and wholly different kind of military training.<sup>14</sup>

After experiments in the Vietnam War, this new strategy, force, and military training rose to front-rank importance during the initial phase of the Afghanistan intervention and then again after the stalemated Iraqi occupation from 2003 to 2006. Now the principles of COIN—1) winning the *hearts and minds* of populations under insurgent threat; 2) gathering detailed intelligence on foes; 3) wielding psychological *carrots* more than military *sticks*; 4) and working *through, with, and by* non-U.S. partners—are accepted in the uppermost reaches of the Pentagon.

Two very recent examples of the Indirect Approach thrust themselves into military thinking out of necessity:

- a. In Afghanistan, the SOF partnership with the Northern Alliance during the U.S.-orchestrated intervention against the Taliban regime after the 9/11 terrorism
- b. In Iraq, the Army-Marine alliance with the Sunni Awakening Councils (Sons of Iraq) movement consolidated in early 2007 against extremists and the Iraqi branch of the Al Qaeda network.

The stakes for America's COIN response are lofty, but no amount of cheer-leading alone can substitute for dispassionate analyses of the threats ahead. While COIN tactics—especially allying with former insurgents—enabled the United States first to topple the Taliban regime in Afghanistan and then turn the tide of the insurgency in central Iraq, the history of conducting antiguerrilla campaigns is fraught with exceptions and caveats.<sup>15</sup> Culture, politics, and local conditions confound any robotic application or template-like approach to neutralizing insurgents. The Indirect Approach doctrine cannot become a dogma. Make no mistake, the historical record of using surrogate forces cautions against operational certitude being placed in any doctrinaire implementation of this strategy. Its application must be from the departure point of steely pragmatism.

Given other options, the Indirect Approach does offer practical measures and economy-of-force solutions to combat insurgencies in many of the

world's remote arenas, where "swamps" can breed threats to the American homeland. Direct interventions encompassing the regime-change paradigm and large-scale conventional armies are impractical within areas devoid of traditional U.S. interests. Not only has the Indirect Approach proved its effectiveness in some contemporary applications, it has few realistic alternatives. Direct warfare, characterized by force-on-force combat operations with lethal outcomes, embodies too many limitations. Large-unit conventional invasions and occupations, particularly in the volatile Middle East, ignite pitted but shadowy resistance along religious as well as political lines. Direct engagements are expensive to the United States in blood and treasure. Moreover, they limit our ability to leverage partnerships for American interests. And more fundamentally, they fall short of dividing our potential adversaries, as took place in Iraq when Sunni militiamen in the Awakening Councils fought to a standstill their co-religious brethren in the very deadly Al Qaeda in Iraq movement.<sup>16</sup>

Obviously, the global battlefield is complex and a strict separation of Indirect and Direct brands of warfare is unrealistic. As SOCOM Commander Admiral Eric T. Olson noted, the two forms "are intertwined and occurring simultaneously."<sup>17</sup> For the sake of clarity in this narrative, the two approaches are separated here, although it is acknowledged that "intertwining" often takes place in actual practice.

### **Alternative Approaches to Counterinsurgencies?**

Some military thinkers posit that global insurgency can be defeated merely by counterterrorism tactics without resorting to a local U.S. military presence or to the use of surrogate forces. They advance a purely punitive approach to overseas contingencies.<sup>18</sup> These strictly smiting tactics, it is argued, sufficed during the early years of the American Republic when the Barbary corsairs boarded the country's merchantmen and took America's seamen hostage. Frustrated but largely powerless, America's early governments paid ransom to free the sailors or tribute to Muslim polities of Tripoli, Tunis, Algiers, and Morocco to be spared assault in the first place. These payments sometimes took as much as 20 percent of the U.S. Congress's budget. Angered about the excessive cash outlays, Thomas Jefferson and James Madison used their presidential powers to persuade Congress to fund retaliatory expeditions against the Mediterranean pirate enclaves. American warships sailed into the harbors on the Barbary Coast to secure the release of American sailors

or to punish the ruling pasha into “a just and lasting peace.”<sup>19</sup> The purely reprisal policy largely succeeded. Cowed by the U.S. Navy’s seaborne power, the Barbary States ceased their raids on the Republic’s commerce, clearing a menace from the seas for the new nation’s legitimate shipping in the Mediterranean.

Contemporary equivalents of the 19th century counterterrorism operations against today’s violent extremists, not bygone pirate enclaves, alone are inadequate for the United States. The 1998 cruise-missile counterstrike glaringly failed to eliminate Al Qaeda in Afghanistan. Launched in retaliation for Osama bin Laden’s twin bombings of the U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania, the air bombardment was little more than a blow struck in the air. This type of operational azimuth fails to eradicate safe havens for today’s terrorists who strive to unleash attacks on the American homeland with torrents of violence or even weapons of mass destruction.<sup>20</sup> The counterterrorist course of action will find few adherents among reasoned military thinkers. Nor will an exclusively punitive track suffice to remove the terrorist threat.

Because of America’s humanitarian ideals and international standing, it is unlikely to copy the murderous tactics used in Algeria to crush the insurgents enflamed by religious extremism during the 1990s or in Sri Lanka to corner and destroy the Tamil Tigers (also known as the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam) in 2009. The United States must think of long-term solutions for uprooting terrorist sanctuaries, not just striking back as was the case with an ineffective missile response to the attacks in East Africa. Enduring results of “draining the swamp” not merely removing the “alligators” are demanded against enemies, who seek political kingdoms on earth accompanied by mass casualties among their opponents’ civilian populations.

Yet the strictly counterterrorist initiative has advocates. Armchair generals argue that the United States can deny terrorists sanctuary by “a very light presence.” “Counterterrorism is not about occupation” argued Bartle Breese Bull, the International Editor of *Prospect* magazine. Bull advocates the “combining of intelligence with specialized military capabilities.” All that is necessary for successes is “our intelligence and surgical strike capacities.” By utilizing embassies and aid organizations (if they will cooperate) for intelligence this is all that is “needed to allow special forces to eliminate terrorist threats as they appear.”<sup>21</sup>

An example of the surgical strike approach is today's missile attacks or commando-type raids within Afghanistan, Pakistan, Somalia, and elsewhere. Even the utilization of these deadly strikes against Al Qaeda figures or Taliban cadres, however, has failed to stem the insurgency, although it may temporarily frustrate its unhindered execution. It has generated widespread anger among people in Afghanistan and Pakistan, who claim that innocent bystanders also died in the bombardments. Indeed the U.S.-overseen Predator flights have been credited with eliminating over a dozen top Al Qaeda and Taliban militants.<sup>22</sup> But the collateral deaths of innocent villagers caused a backlash that led General McChrystal to tighten the attack guidelines in a "tactical directive" for the employment of bombs, missiles, and other heavy weaponry in populated areas.<sup>23</sup>

Efforts to eliminate or decrease civilian deaths are seen as a means to win over the ordinary citizens. "Air power contains the seeds of our own destruction, if we do not use it responsibly," said General McChrystal.<sup>24</sup> The difficulty, as COIN commanders recognize, remains how to separate the militia targets from the civilians they deliberately hide among. The use of human shields restricts the recourse to pinpoint bombings, leaving the more prosaic but discriminate applications of firepower to on-the-ground NATO, American, or their surrogate Afghan troops. Some in the ranks conclude that "the same measures put in place to protect the civilians can protect the Taliban as well."<sup>25</sup> This self-restraint policy will be sorely tested as small U.S. infantry units take casualties from Taliban fire. Squad and platoon leaders will call for close air support to offset their inferior numbers or weaponry, while they question the official rationale for not harming civilians who are known to resupply and shelter militants in their midst.<sup>26</sup>

The beguiling notion of counterterrorism and "surgical strike capacities" appears feasible until the hard realities dawn. Imagine U.S. forces hunkering down inside beleaguered forts under insistent attack and reliant on air resupply. The Taliban, Al Qaeda, and their allied warlords, of course, will not idly stand by while being raided by America's elite commandos (Navy SEALs, Army Rangers, and other elements). U.S. bases would be constantly infiltrated, besieged, and isolated. How can aircraft above or commando raiders on the ground differentiate among combatants and bystanders? How can suspect terrorists be identified, apprehended, questioned, and incarcerated? Where will the local intelligence come from? Only an attuned military force

on the ground working with the indigenous population can ferret out useful information for apprehension of fugitives or counterattacks on insurgents.

American quick-in-and-out assaults, moreover, would be depicted as wanton depredations on hapless women, children, and ordinary Afghans going about their daily routines. Innocent lives, according to U.S. commanders, are already too often taken with missile strikes from overhead drones, driving the locals into the arms of the insurgents. The almost inevitable xenophobic friction between the population and an occupation army leads to the indigenous folks siding with the militants. Thus the local population would soon throw in their lot with the anti-U.S. forces. The U.S. “ink spots” would soon shrink to surrounded specs along with their influence and effectiveness. An authoritative RAND study summarized the dangers of this solo military approach: “Trying to crush insurgency by military brute force alone in the Muslim world risks validating the jihadists’ claim, increasing their appeal, and replacing their losses.”<sup>27</sup>

Nor do offshore bombardments or from-the-sky strikes preempt insurgencies. The Vice Chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff made this point when he discussed the military’s strategic plans for missiles with the capability to strike any target in the world within minutes. Marine Corps General James Cartwright spoke publicly in mid-2009 about the 5-years-in-development Prompt Global Strike missile that can deliver an attack “any place on the face of the Earth in an hour.” The general extolled the speed and accuracy of these transcontinental missiles and other hypersonic weapons. He noted their shortcomings also. Global strike is “not enough to sustain a fight.” It is a weapon targeted at one aim-point. Thus U.S. foreign-stationed and actively deployed troops remain a necessity in an insurgent-prone world.<sup>28</sup> Once there, the COIN troops recruit in-country personnel to divide their foes, win over the population, and fight the insurgents with local forces. This tactic has become the American way of war at the beginning of the 21st century.

## Offensive and Defensive Indirect Operations

Exponents of surrogate warfare often neglect to differentiate between two types of this indirect method—defensive and offensive forms. The defensive mode is where American forces are aligned with indigenous troops in defending a host government. They are the “forces of order.” In this role, U.S. troops are working with the host country’s armed forces to resist a secessionist movement as in the southern Philippines or antigovernment



Taliban militias in contemporary Afghanistan. American and local forces are attempting not just to preserve political order but also to improve the welfare of ordinary people and their government's responsiveness to its citizens. Insufficient attention to a population's political grievances and economic necessities by the host rulers undermines the Indirect Approach. Thus SOF and regular troops rely on their hosts to dis-

pense state services, avoid corruption, and behave with rectitude toward their fellow citizens.

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*The defensive mode is where American forces are aligned with indigenous troops in defending a host government. They are the "forces of order."*

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Bettering the lot of average citizens first means safety from insurgent attacks, coercion, or intimidation. This security umbrella also encompasses protection from the host country's own army and police. These internal security forces need training in proper conduct along with instruction in marksmanship, patrolling, and ambushing. Incultation of the correct treatment of villagers requires training, conditioning, and the example of U.S. forces. Supplying the population with amenities such as clean water, electricity, roads, schools, and medical clinics forms an important dimension of preliminary nation-building tasks. In Iraq and Afghanistan, the United States preceded to the next stage of state construction by fostering conditions for good governance, political parties, fair and free elections, and constitutional government. Political integration of disaffected ethnic populations into a state lies at the crux of U.S. COIN. Much depends on host governments, no matter how committed American resources and SOF actions. A smaller U.S. military footprint and a larger host-nation presence helps minimize the perception of an American occupation bent on producing facsimiles of U.S. society. Against the backdrop of a massive and growing U.S. national debt, the envisioned societal reconfiguring in Afghanistan lies beyond being a practical model for replication in the world's many ungoverned places.

Following the invasion phase in Afghanistan and Iraq, the United States fell prey to fierce insurgencies in which it assumed the primary combatant role. While fighting insurgents, U.S.-led Coalition troops painstakingly assembled surrogate military and police forces so as to implement the Indirect Approach against the sectarian killers and ethnic militias. In these circumstances the U.S. ground forces bought time and space for indigenous units to be mobilized, trained, armed, and seasoned. Elsewhere—Pakistan,



the Horn of Africa, and the Philippines—SOF and other service personnel cycled into the Indirect Approach without the necessity of engaging in large-scale COIN operations with scattered militants.

Within the defensive mode, one further distinction can be drawn that requires little elaboration. It relates to the scale of the Indirect Approach. American efforts in the Horn of Africa and the Philippines, for example, exemplify a small-scale COIN model. The numbers of U.S. troops employed are modest and their visibility low. A full-throttle insurgency, by necessity, demands a much larger U.S. military presence in conflict-ridden theaters like Iraq and Afghanistan. It is obvious that the optimal arena for the Indirect Approach lies in quieter terrain, where it holds the prospect of forestalling a full-blown insurgency. Raging insurgencies offer much less scope for a truly Indirect Approach because by necessity American land forces are directly involved against the insurgents.

The offensive format of the Indirect Approach was exemplified by the U.S.-led assault on the Taliban regime in Afghanistan right after the September 11, 2001 terrorist attack. Rather than unleashing the combined armories of American power on the Taliban regime in Kabul for refusing to hand over Osama bin Laden, the Pentagon looked to the locally rooted Northern Alliance as a surrogate army. Implacable foes of the Taliban since losing Kabul to its militia in 1996, the Northern Alliance fought on as insurgents for control of the mountainous country. U.S. Special Operation Forces and Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) agents harnessed, channeled, and aided the Northern Alliance to topple the Taliban rule of Mullah Mohammed Omar for its sheltering of bin Laden, the perpetrator of the 9/11 terrorism. On a less grand scale in Iraq, the Pentagon again resorted to marshalling local opponents of the Baghdad regime. During the “shock and awe” phase of the U.S. invasion into southern Iraq, SOF tapped into the ethnic nationalism of the Kurds whose Peshmerga militia along with a Special Forces team attacked Saddam Hussein’s army to the south. This was an approach borne of necessity. Ankara rejected Washington’s request to transit armored forces across Turkish territory to open a northern front in Iraq.

The offensive course of action enjoys a rich and successful history. Afghanistan during the 1980s witnessed the implementation of the so-called Reagan Doctrine. In response to the Soviet invasion installing a puppet ruler in mountain-bound state, President Jimmy Carter first shipped World

War I-era Lee-Enfield bolt-action rifles to the Afghan resistance. Next, when Ronald Reagan settled into the White House, he greatly stepped up military and financial assistance to the *mujahideen* (holy warriors) resistance to the Soviet occupation, culminating in the transfer of Stinger shoulder-fired anti-aircraft missiles, highly effective against the Red Army's Mi-24 Hind helicopter gunships. Reagan's support helped turn the tide of battle against the Soviet invaders who withdrew in defeat in early 1989.

Reagan also aided the *contras* in Nicaragua against the ruling Marxist party of the Sandinistas. This offensive Indirect Approach allowed the United States to counter Soviet and Cuban influence in the Central American nation. The CIA armed, financed, and trained Nicaraguan exiles in next-door Honduras to wage a guerrilla campaign in a conflict that claimed some 30,000 Nicaraguan lives from 1981 to 1990. Nearby, the Reagan government turned to a defensive application of the Indirect Approach by providing minimal aid to the embattled government of El Salvador as it struggled against guerrillas bent on imposing a communist-style regime on the tiny Latin American state. Assistance—material and instructional—from the United States proved decisive in both Nicaragua and El Salvador. Had Washington not gone to their aid, indirectly fighting communist subversion, the outcome in Central America would have seen Soviet client regimes in the two countries.<sup>29</sup> The Reagan administration additionally tried unsuccessfully to turn back the gains of the Marxist government in Angola by aid to Jonas Savimbi's movement.<sup>30</sup>

Offensive surrogate warfare is far easier to execute than its defensive counterpart. It usually translates into a more limited and briefer military, political, and economic presence by U.S. armed forces. Normally, arms, financing, training, shared intelligence, and sometimes the application of direct U.S. conventional military power are provided. The "soft" population steps of classic COIN are not usually a major component of the offensive phase of operations. Standing up a government apparatus after victory forms one ingredient of post-military operations as was the case in Afghanistan after the Taliban defeat. The Afghan case witnessed the United States moving from an offensive phase to defense operations after the Taliban commenced an insurgency in the mid-2000s to take back power.

## The Indirect Approach—the Default Option Now

Conventional warfare tactics will not succeed in deterring and confronting a global insurgency nor will other direct military approaches traditionally wielded against the regular armies in the great wars of the 20th century. Massive invasions, regime changes, and country occupations are as ineffective as they are unsustainable in an America economically hard pressed by a deep recession and by a population wary and wearied of foreign interventions in light of the Iraq War's exertions. An economy-of-force prescription to secure American safety and interests has become a necessity. In some sense, the Indirect Approach is America's default option in its current struggle against extremist-infused insurgencies in many parts of the world. Executing the Indirect Approach in different environments, therefore, requires making adjustments at the grass-roots level. But above the tactical threshold and often within the operational tier, if not higher in the politico-diplomatic realm, there lurk risks and uncertainties.

When any doctrine is embraced wholeheartedly, with eyes wide shut, its adoption can give way to blinkered zealotry. The purpose of this essay is to adopt the honorable role of Devil's Advocate to raise issues and to remind practitioners that blind faith in a doctrine is folly. Lest any student of military history forget, the Vietnam War began for the United States as an advisory and partner-building operation with the South Vietnamese government and armed forces. Seeing its limited resources as doomed to fail, Washington escalated its commitment and backed into a multiyear, raging conflict that sapped the nation's well-being. The history of the U.S. Army's official studies and military intellectuals is replete with miscalculation and even tragic error in planning for armed engagements.<sup>31</sup> In just one example, the United States prepared to combat Soviet advances in Central Europe but wound up instead fighting to repel an invasion from the communist regime on the Korean peninsula during the early 1950s. Caution and circumspection about the applicability of any overarching doctrine is in order, lest it become a dogma. Boosterism for specific military approaches—for example, the Maginot Line—can lead to catastrophe. In short, the Indirect Approach is not a universal silver bullet and even less so a template to be superimposed on every trouble spot without due diligence.

Nor should a partnership strategy over-reach by grafting a 21st century American societal model onto lands struggling to clamber into the modern

era. Appreciating societal and operational distinctions will aid in the application of the Indirect Approach. For example, the distinctive Iraqi surge operation might be considered as a ready-made model for Afghanistan. But the Indirect Approach drew from three interrelated factors in the Iraq insurgency that are not yet present in Afghanistan. In central Iraq the foreign-led Al Qaeda affiliate violated cultural norms with its nearly indiscriminate violence, doctrinaire imposition of Islam, and finally, targeting for assassination Sunni tribal leaders when they opposed Abu Musab al-Zarqawi's policies. By the end of 2006, U.S. ground forces had begun to change the military balance on the ground in the cities of Fallujah and Ramadi, the provincial capital of Anbar. The arrival of additional combat troops early the next year gave the American ground forces the upper hand. The U.S. reinforcements on the ground and better COIN tactics confronted the Sunni, which constituted only a fifth of Iraq's population, with the prospect of defeat. Instead, their tribal militias, amply bankrolled with U.S. cash payments, joined with the Coalition forces against Al Qaeda. The United States was greatly favored by the turnaround of the Dulaimi Tribal Confederation within Anbar province in central Iraq. This large, cohesive tribal grouping laid the foundation of the "awakening," bringing in other tribal entities.<sup>32</sup>

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*Appreciating societal and operational distinctions will aid in the application of the Indirect Approach.*

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Conditions within Afghanistan are currently quite different from central Iraq. The Taliban observes most cultural taboos within the Pashtun community. They made a comeback in the early 2000s thanks to brutality and corruption of Kabul's local officials.<sup>33</sup> The Taliban insurgents responded to local concerns, instituted an elementary law and order, and so far avoided repeating the excesses of Al Qaeda in Iraq terrorist movement. Moreover, the Pashtun—the country's largest ethnic community—deeply resent the Kabul government's abuse of power, villainy, and pervasive corruption. Nor are there present today Afghan versions of the Sunni figures Abu Risha al Sattar and the Dulaimi elders who spread the "awakening" from tribe to tribe. The mountains and valleys of Afghanistan enforce territorial compartmentalization, making intertribal cooperation difficult among the fragmented tribes with their internecine and overlapping conflicts.<sup>34</sup>

As of this juncture, U.S. and NATO forces are battling to establish sufficient security in the violent southeastern belt to enable local leaders to line

up their communities against the Taliban insurgents. Notable breakthroughs, nonetheless, have taken place. In early 2010, the Shinwari people—a subtribe of the Ghilzai tribal confederation—joined with the central government in its anti-Taliban campaign. Their cooperation marked a key realignment because of the Ghilzai stand, second only to the Durrani tribal confederation among the Pashtun. Moreover, the Durrani already has many members holding senior posts in the Harmid Karzai (who himself comes from the Durrani branch) government.<sup>35</sup> Thus the Shinwari conversion to the government side points toward other Ghilzai subtribes taking the same step. West of Kabul, in a less violent arena, the Public Protection Programs (PPPs) have also begun to marshal community self-defense units known as *Guardians* against the insurgents. Started in early 2009, the PPPs will face a daunting environment in the Taliban-contested zones along the Pakistan border, across which the insurgents enjoy sanctuaries for recruitment, training, and regrouping.

Backing and relying on tribal elements or local village forces is a double-edged sword, it could be argued, for the policy cuts at cross purposes with the overarching goal of forging national institutions, such as multiethnic and merit-based police, army, and civil authority structures. Tribal arrangements, to this way of thinking, are anachronistic; they look to ancient customs and practices that have little to contribute to modern states dependent on central governments. Matching ends and means—the ongoing calculus of COIN—applies especially in the Indirect Approach. As a practical matter, tribes capture their member's loyalty, administer rough justice, and field militias that can deal a blow to the Taliban and establish stability in the countryside. They represent innate, formed, and ready-to-use forces to wage anti-insurgency struggles.

Beyond the Iraq conflict there are other places where the U.S. military backed the Indirect Approach that are worthy of our attention. The purpose of this monograph, therefore, is to examine three modern case studies where the Indirect Approach fared poorly or, at the least, raised concerns. Its use in Vietnam and the Horn of Africa witnessed shortcomings in surrogate warfare. The third case, the Philippines, is arguably a success story, even somewhat a model for other applications of the Indirect Approach. Yet it too manifests some warnings about the universality of relying on other forces and their governments to wage surrogate warfare to a satisfactory conclusion. At the least, the drawbacks, even unintended consequences, of American

COIN practices cum-nation-building endeavors must serve as yellow caution lights as the U.S. military peers ahead toward a troubled horizon.

### **Vietnam and the Aborted Indirect Approach**

America's Vietnam War offers up many lessons for COIN operations. That conflict still stands as *the* contemporary starting point for examining COIN practices. America possesses a long history in waging small wars and antiguerrilla fights stretching from engagements with British regulars, to Native Americans on continent's frontiers, and onto incursions around the Caribbean. But its large-scale conventional wars in the first half of the 21st century erased much of the memory and doctrine for COIN of earlier periods. Vietnam, as we now know, was the call that reawakened the U.S. Army to the necessity of COIN, although it was a long time in answering the "phone." America's military involvement in Southeast Asia started even before the 1954 defeat of France's colonial rule in Indochina. In time, the United States unveiled a quintessential experiment in the Indirect Approach or surrogate warfare.

In late 1961, U.S. Army Special Forces began sustained contact with the Rhade tribe of the Montagnard people living in South Vietnam's Central Highlands. By that date, the Montagnard communities felt the pressure of the Viet Cong (a contraction for Vietnamese Communists) insurgents and the South Vietnamese authorities. Located along the border of Cambodia and Laos, the Montagnard habitat fell athwart the Viet Cong's infiltration routes from north to south, which recorded increased foot traffic by 1959. The Viet Cong preyed on the upland people's dissatisfaction with the central government in Saigon and tried to recruit tribesmen to its guerrilla ranks. When the Montagnards stayed aloof, they came under attack by the Viet Cong. The Montagnards were also threatened by government-sponsored resettlement schemes of ethnic Vietnamese on their lands. Saigon dispatched some 80,000 refugees fleeing the communist North Vietnam onto Montagnard localities after the 1954 Geneva Accords divided the country. The two distinct peoples shared neither ethnicity nor language or culture and religion. For the Montagnards' part, they resented the encroachments by the lowland Vietnamese on their agricultural lands and hunting grounds. The Vietnamese, on the other hand, held the highlanders in contempt as savages who lived simple lives and shifted from area to area for fresh soil and forests without establishing an advanced sedentary civilization.

To block the infiltration route as well as to secure the borderlands, the Special Forces armed, trained, and organized village defenses among the Montagnard volunteers from December 1961. During the first year of the Green Beret efforts, scores of highlanders' established village-based self-defense forces under the Civilian Irregular Defense Group (CIDG) Program. Often the Montagnard recruits within the CIDG ranks repulsed Viet Cong assaults, although some villages did fall to the attackers. The defenders honed their fighting capabilities and others learned techniques for intelligence-gathering, scouting, psychological operations, and military instruction. The Green Beret units also assisted with medical treatment, farming, and education.

The U.S. military training and civic action programs won over the mountain people who defended themselves, swore allegiance to the Saigon government, and even founded programs to rehabilitate former Viet Cong sympathizers. In time, the indigenous people formed their own health care, agricultural, and militia training cadres that geometrically expanded the scope of the American staff, which won the confidence of the locals while developing their martial and noncombatant skills. Funded and armed largely by the CIA, the Special Forces possessed flexibility away from the regular Army bureaucracy for their paramilitary projects.<sup>36</sup>

Special Forces units operating in the mist-shrouded Central Highlands among the Montagnard tribesmen did grasp the nature of rural revolutionary warfare. Their rice-roots-based self-defense communities, augmented with military civic action and psychological warfare soon locked out Viet Cong from parts of the highlands. The Special Forces COIN mission made rapid headway in rising up a surrogate force; it trained, armed, and helped over 35,000 Montagnards establish their own village defenses.<sup>37</sup>

Even with all the CIDG's progress, the regular U.S. Army command harbored deep misgivings about the role played by the CIA in financing, supplying, and directing the bottoms-up effort, setting the stage for a policy shift. This command also desired to move from a defensive pacification orientation to an offensive stance. The Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (MACV), the powerful U.S. unified command framework for all military forces in the South, pushed for a war of massive assault to "find, fix, and kill" the enemy. Therefore, MACV removed Special Forces from their village defense mode to a role supporting the offensive operations of the U.S. military forces rapidly steaming into South Vietnam by mid-1965.



The CIDG villages that did not collapse into disarray were integrated into the larger Strategic Hamlet Program, which after 1962 attempted to resettle the larger Vietnamese rural population into protected enclaves to dry up the sea in which the guerrilla fish swam. The Viet Cong guerrillas quickly infiltrated the Strategic Hamlets hollowing out their resistance or directly besieging them until they fell.

Other problems plagued the Strategic Hamlets. Some peasants were compelled to relocate into hamlets; the compensation for the forced resettlement was never paid. Inside in what were to be defensible perimeters, the poorly trained inhabitants frequently refused to fight off the Viet Cong. Some simply turned over their weapons to the insurgents. The Strategic Hamlet effort, while appealing in theory, resulted in alienation from, and anger at, the Saigon government. The Strategic Hamlet Program, if not the idea of defending rural communities from the Viet Cong, died with the Diem regime when it was toppled in November 1963.<sup>38</sup>

Even before the Strategic Hamlets failure, the American-led political and military overhaul undermined the Montagnard success story. Under the 1963 Operation Switchback, highland ethnic villages reverted to Saigon's control as exercised through its South Vietnamese Special Forces, who lacked the proper training, competence, and political sensitivity to step into the breach created by the transfer. The transfer alienated the Montagnards and soon scuttled the CIDG Program.<sup>39</sup> The Montagnards and Vietnamese disliked each other immensely. The South Vietnamese government and military were unprepared to take up the Indirect Approach of the Green Berets. They resented the autonomy enjoyed by the Montagnards since French colonial rule. The Viet Cong, moreover, took advantage of the antagonism. North Vietnam deployed skilled propagandists to the south. They collected taxes, conscripted labor, and used terrorism whenever necessary by eliminating village headmen, school teachers, and civil authority from the south. The regular South Vietnamese soldiers also presented a problem. Their brutality, petty thievery, and general disorderliness torpedoed U.S. COIN efforts and exacerbated tensions with the Montagnards.

Operation Switchback also changed the focus from defensive, village-grounded security to offensive and overtly military operations into Viet Cong areas and to the development of border-surveillance missions. The operation's tight timelines did not permit an adequate period to prepare the Montagnards for their new roles. Critics at the time registered concerns that



Montagnards were being used as mercenaries in strike operations beyond their local zones to the neglect of the earlier successful missions as village militia intended for local protection. Finding, fighting, and defeating the Viet Cong became the new orientation rather than sticking with the Montagnards' proven model and building slowly a new force of the tribal warriors.

In examining the Montagnard case study for its wider application, military thinkers and SOF practitioners ought to be aware of its limitations. Integrating the Montagnard units into the greater Vietnamese army was risky without a sea change in Saigon's thinking and military forces. First, the Vietnamese mentality lacked the sensitivity needed to accommodate the Montagnard culture. Second, even the Vietnamese special forces were unprepared for the role of indirectly guiding surrogate units under their command in a COIN campaign. American military behavior also possessed severe limitations. Regular U.S. Army instructors raised a South Vietnamese army that reflected an American conventional military. Other factors bedeviled a smooth transition from U.S. Green Beret tutelage of the Montagnards to a South Vietnamese one.

The Republic of Vietnam's district and provincial administrative machinery creaked along while being hampered with endemic corruption and fear of Viet Cong murder and intimidation that engulfed much of the South's society. A call to reform Vietnamese society constituted a nation-rebuilding mission of enormous proportions. Dealing with intertribal antagonisms that were manifested in corruption, abuse, and violence is an essential part of COIN that soon blends into the much larger task of nation-building along Western lines. Counterinsurgency tactics alone are not COIN. The full array of COIN measures in Vietnam encompassed erecting civic institutions, medical clinics, and schoolrooms as well as self-defense capacities—in short state-building steps. State-building is a Herculean undertaking demanding decades-long commitment, large sums of money, and strategic patience. Amid a raging insurgency, social and political reconstruction difficulties are compounded. National reconstruction in Vietnam lay beyond the American resources, understanding, and timeframe. As such, the Vietnam War offers a cautionary pause to any counterinsurgent campaign in severely underdeveloped and violent lands.

One drawback that later emerged from analyses of the Montagnard case noted the poor results from the altered military role played by the tribal warriors after Operation Switchback. MACV dropped the village defense

militia concept almost entirely for the Montagnard units. Instead, the powerful American headquarters just outside Saigon replaced it with an offensive mission against the Viet Cong. The change in orientation made them less effective in their former COIN mode. Analysts observed that the CIDG no longer functioned as a home guard but as strike forces. One expert, Douglas Blaufarb, commented: “In this role they were close to being mercenaries, something rather different from their original role, and *from the viewpoint of the counterinsurgency, not as useful* [italics added].”<sup>40</sup> The Vietnam experience demonstrated how difficult it became to move from a successful local-based indigenous protection force to an offensive one without a loss of effectiveness in the overall anti-insurgency effort.

Practitioners of the Indirect Approach, nonetheless, must be wary of projecting universal lessons from the Montagnard case study for several reasons. The Montagnards numbered only around 600,000 amongst a larger Vietnamese population of 20 million. The tribesmen organized into the village self-defense units tallied between 35,000 to 50,000 in the early 1960s, when the Vietnamese forces stood at approximately 200,000. But later during the Vietnamization phase of the war, the South Vietnamese Army reached half a million troops, with slightly less in the reserves. The Montagnard constituency, while significant, was still small in comparison with the overall armed forces. More crucially, the independent orientation of the Montagnards was sharply at odds with the all-encompassing writ of Saigon. This go-it-alone streak away from—or distrust toward—the central government is shared in Afghanistan and other nations plagued with contemporary insurgencies. The tribal-or-national approach to COIN also forms part of the debate in Afghanistan, where advocates of relying on tribal units square off against exponents of forging a national army and police force to combat the Taliban.<sup>41</sup>

Another caveat about the exemplary Montagnard project requires noting. As an unintended consequence, the Special Forces contributed to some of the Montagnards’ resistance to the central government. By organizing the tribesmen into cohesive units, the special ops troops contributed to their separatism from the larger society. Christopher Ives in his study of the highland COIN program concluded: “Indeed, the intercession by the American Special Forces soldiers strengthened the nascent ethno-nationalism of the minority communities with both the rearming of the highlanders and through the civic action efforts that affected development.”<sup>42</sup> Therefore, a

contribution to U.S. surrogate warfare can result in less than productive outcomes when trying to foster unity across subgroups in an insurgency. It makes the overall COIN campaign tricky to implement across a patchwork of clans, tribes, sects, or ethnic communities. As U.S.-orchestrated COIN inclines toward nation-building endeavors, the integration of distinct peoples presents a challenge, especially because the Indirect Approach may emphasize separateness to harness martial qualities against insurgents. SOF implementers of the Indirect Approach must ask themselves: Is it better to defeat the local insurgent band or to build a nationwide anti-insurgent army? Does building a national security force impede the overall mission to defeat the militants? Often the two starkly drawn contrasts are absent, and the answer is to build one tribe at a time within a national framework.

The defeat of the Republic of Vietnam 2 years after the American military departure entailed far-reaching implications for the United States and its COIN proficiency. Along with an isolationist swing inward and deep political disenchantment among the American electorate, the unpopular conflict also saw the turning away from the complexities of COIN warfare among the Army establishment, which resolved never again to become entangled in a guerrilla conflict. Conventional armor and air power incisions, like those in the Persian Gulf War and the opening months of the Iraq War, won the admiration of the Pentagon war planners. Not until the expanding insurgency in Iraq provoked soul-searching among U.S. officers did the Army and the Marine Corps introduce change in its operations, draft the new *Counterinsurgency Field Manual*, and relearn the utility of the Indirect Approach to insurgency.

## **The Surrogate Experience in Iraq**

The Indirect Approach—both among the Montagnards and even the regular South Vietnamese forces—met setbacks as noted in the preceding paragraphs. One of the chief problems was the integration of irregular units made up of an ethnic minority into a national force. Neither the Montagnards nor the South Vietnamese received much in the way of practical preparation. Indeed the very training and fielding of the Montagnards by the U.S. Special Forces unwittingly exacerbated their animosity toward the greater Vietnamese community, who they feared and loathed. This experience 40 years ago was not behind us in the Iraq War; indeed the past was merely prologue.

The difficulty in reintegrating distinct minorities into larger national forces was seen again in post-surge Iraq. As violence ebbed in Iraq, the United States pressured the Shiite-dominated central government of Prime Minister Nuri Kamal al-Maliki to welcome back the Sunni peoples into the national fold. Among Iraq's 27 million people, about 60 percent are Shia, 20 percent Sunni, and the remainder Kurds and much smaller ethnic groups. The Maliki government relied mainly on Shiite Iraqis for its power and for its security forces. As the insurgency slackened, the Pentagon urged the formation of a single military force to promote national unity.

Specifically, the U.S. military pressed for incorporation of Sunni militias, which had battled Al Qaeda insurgents, into Baghdad's security apparatus. This would require the Baghdad government to open its army and police ranks to the "Sons of Iraq" units that the United States formerly subsidized as part of the surge operation to bring peace and stability to central Iraq at the start of 2007. The role of the Sons of Iraq (or the Awakening Councils) proved crucial to the American-organized COIN. Reintegrating these anti-Al Qaeda forces into the overall Iraqi Security Forces, nonetheless, presented problems in implementation. Despite its massive military presence on which the Iraq government depended for its security, the United States had to work through hesitant Baghdad officials to secure the incorporation of the Sunni militias into the country's armed forces.<sup>43</sup>

Fearful of the Sunni minority for its role in Saddam Hussein's repressive regime, the Shiite authorities proved reluctant to forget and forgive their past tormentors. In the end, the Maliki government only slightly gave way to the American military's insistence. His government continued to arrest Awakening leaders through 2009. It also disbarred nearly 500 candidates many with ties to Saddam Hussein's former regime from running in the March 2010 parliamentary election. The detentions and exclusions stirred anxiety in the greater Sunni community, despite an appeals court's decision to overturn the ban on the candidates.<sup>44</sup> Ethnic harmony is essential for Iraq's territorial integrity. As of this writing, the historical jury is still out on the decision about Iraq's continued unity. The goal is still incomplete. Tensions cut across all ethnic communities as they jockey for power, positions, and prosperity. In the north, the Kurdish

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population longs for its own ultra-autonomy, if not outright independence. The centrifugal forces within Iraq that exploded with the ouster of Saddam Hussein have yet to abate.

The Southeast Asian history of micro-nationalism might repeat itself thousands of miles distant and four decades from the Vietnam experience. Signs of ethno-nationalism conflicting with national unity have repeatedly surfaced in Iraq. Assessments of post-American withdrawal point toward difficulties in fashioning a unified country. The Persian Gulf country remains sharply divided among Sunni, Shia, and Kurdish populations. These ethnic divisions defined the insurgency and they persist today. The Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) lack a national ethos to insulate them from the political influence of sectarian political movements. Instead of conducting themselves as a national army, the Iraqi military is being pulled and politicized by ethno-sectarian parties, setting the stage for eventual disintegration of Iraq in a post-American civil war. One study pointed out that as American commanders prepare to exit the country, their ability is slipping away to steer “the ISF toward the direction of loyalty to the state.”<sup>45</sup> In Afghanistan, ethnic divisions, especially against the majority Pashtun tribes, bedevil the necessary harmony for a united COIN front.

In Vietnam, the Green Berets won the Montagnards’ admiration and respect for their sharing the dangers and hardships of village life. This loyalty was not readily transferable to the Vietnamese Special Forces, who took over for the Americans under Operation Switchback. Intangible qualities—like trust, goodwill, or allegiance—are fragile and not easily transplanted especially in ethnically split societies marked by ancient mistrust, hatred, and long bouts of bloodshed. Countries with dense vegetation or steep mountains inhibit national unity, making it even more treacherous to build nations among separated and fearful ethnic communities. Some of the difficulties in South Vietnam offer a major caveat to SOF engaged in overseas contingency operations against violent extremists. Building distinct, cohesive military forces within an ethnic or village community is one thing; later integrating these same units into a national framework is quite another type of endeavor. Planning for eventual national solidarity constitutes an element of a well-laid approach in the artful practice of COIN. In the short term, pragmatism, nevertheless, dictates a strategy of defeating the insurgents before attempting to fashion an integrated national society along modern lines.

## The Somalia Episode

On the other side of the world, the Horn of Africa, and within it, Somalia specifically offers a more recent example of a less than resounding success story for the indirect way of war against violent extremism. The Horn of Africa, a huge geographical area, is marked by a discontented population, grinding poverty, and weak or unpopular governments. Roughly 165 million people inhabit this expanse that is made up of six countries—Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, and Sudan. For centuries, the Horn of Africa served as a gateway to Africa from the Middle East. It lies just a short boat ride across the Gulf of Aden from Yemen on the Arabian Peninsula. Outside its urban centers, little economic development is evident in this desolate and arid zone about a fifth the size of the United States.

Just to its south, Tanzania and Kenya were victims of the Al Qaida-orchestrated 1998 embassy bombings. Additionally, Kenya was the scene of terrorist attacks on a hotel and an Israeli airliner in 2002. These attacks emanated from neighboring Somalia. Being devoid of an effective central government since the 1991 coup removed the military strongman, Muhamed Siad Barre, Somalia served as a terrorist transit zone. Somalia also harbors burgeoning fundamentalist Islamic movements, which became more prominent with the passing of its military ruler. While some groups are merely reformist, others have taken up the *jihad* (holy war) cause against their countrymen and foreign aid workers. Strife is now endemic to the Texas-sized country. Ethnic Somalis also spill across the country's borders with Djibouti, Kenya, and especially Ethiopia, exacerbating tensions within them as they make territorial claims on their foreign hosts for a Greater Somalia.

Somalia is a badly fractured country. The northern corner fell under British colonial rule for nearly a century until its independence in 1960. Before its self-rule, the southern strip suffered under Italian colonialism. A merger of the two territories never really took hold. A quintessential failed state, Somalia hosts all the pathologies and problems associated with Africa and the nearby Middle East. Divided by clans and warlords, the Muslim country is anarchic. Its near collapse, in fact, prompted two parts of the country to split off from Somalia—Puntland and Somaliland—to the north and east of the rump state. Both these territorial offspring remained relatively more tranquil than their parent, which has received the most antiterrorist attention from the United States.

While Somalia is nearly devoid of internal stability, its political gyrations reverberate regionwide. Efforts to reconcile its clan factions led to an American setback in 1993, when a SOF raid to capture the notorious warlord Mohammed Aidid's lieutenants ran into fierce resistance in the streets of Mogadishu, the seaside capital. After two Blackhawk helicopters were shot down by small-arms fire and 18 elite U.S. servicemen were killed in the dusty streets, the Clinton White House called off its nation-building experiment and pulled American forces out 6 months later.<sup>46</sup> The American withdrawal encouraged Osama bin Laden, who noted Washington's retreat in his 1996 chilling fatwa threatening "Crusaders and Zionists" with destruction.<sup>47</sup> Next the United Nations departed. The country soon plummeted downward in chaos, virtually unnoticed by the outside world.

### **Somalia after 9/11**

Just as the 9/11 attacks revived Pentagon interest in the southern Philippine islands (to be described below) and other potential terrorist sanctuaries, they also concentrated attention on Somalia and the greater Horn of Africa. The Defense Department decided to preclude the growth of likely terrorist safe havens in the Horn by dispatching military forces to the region. In June 2002, it stood up the Combined Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa (CJTF-HOA) in the tiny wedge of country, Djibouti. Known before its independence in 1977 as French Somalia, Djibouti fronts on the Red Sea just where it opens into the Gulf of Aden and beyond to the Indian Ocean. The tiny state has less than a million inhabitants. Fort Lemonier became the home for some 1,800 U.S. troops and a French Foreign Legion brigade. U.S. forces also stage operations from bases in Kenya (Manda Bay) and Ethiopia (Bilate, Hurso, and Gode). Operating mainly from a former Foreign Legion outpost, the American mission centered on human and signal intelligence acquisition, humanitarian endeavors, and chiefly military training of African soldiers for counterterrorism. Or as stated by its occupants, its job is "waging peace" in lands afflicted by starvation, disease, lawlessness, violence, poverty, and Al Qaeda.<sup>48</sup>

The Bush administration earmarked \$100 million in 2003 for an anti-terrorism campaign by boosting the civil and security capabilities within the states in the Horn. The financial assistance to Africa and the Djibouti post served as a forerunner to the 2007 announcement of the U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM), the latest and sixth geographical combatant



command. To a degree greater than its sister commands, AFRICOM is to implement jointly with the Department of State and other civilian agencies the so-called 3-D approach to chaotic arenas, fragile states, and potential insurgency—combining defense, diplomacy, and development. The CJTF-HOA remains a microcosm of the continental enterprise for 53 nations.

Nipping an insurgency in the bud, as often asserted, is deemed the most effective means of preventing extremists taking root in receptive soil. Once it becomes entrenched, the COIN costs more in lives, money, and tears. To preempt low-intensity conflicts in the Horn, the CJTF-HOA has employed a mix of measures, such as the use of surrogate forces and of hearts-and-minds measures to win over the loyalty of the population. Winning popular sympathy requires first protection and security for people from insurgent attacks or intimidation. Next the bestowing of human services to the general population figures prominently among champions of benign COIN. Fresh water, electricity, medical and veterinarian care, passable roads, and schools—all rank high as necessary services to convince citizens that the government has their best interests at heart. Therefore, the American way of COIN shades into rudimentary nation-building to establish government-run social welfare services, to mollify intra-nation ethnic antagonisms, and to channel political grievances toward the ballot box—all enterprises seen at work in Afghanistan.

Tapping indigenous troops for all these civil-engagement missions is primary. Host governments and local forces win legitimacy by protecting and aiding ordinary citizens. Governments likely to succumb to insurgents are perceived as remote, uncaring, brutal, and corrupt. The idea is to strengthen indigenous institutions and to train their officials in the proper conduct. Soldiers, police, and civilian authorities have to win the hearts and minds of their fellow citizens, not alienate them through highhandedness, villainy, or cruelty. Thus the American way of COIN flows directly into social-reengineering of societies with a high dose of American ideals. The transference of strictly military skills will not suffice; the goal for counterinsurgents is to use “every opportunity to help the populace and meet its needs and expectations,” as outlined in the *Counterinsurgency Field Manual*.<sup>49</sup>

Foreign soldiers are rarely trusted or truly welcomed for long stretches, particularly when considered an army of occupation. Nationalism and xenophobia lurk just beneath the surface. Locals view foreigners as occupiers or at least outsiders, something that insurgents play upon to incite



resistance. Therefore, the Indirect Approach emphasizes the importance of local surrogate forces for campaigns against violent extremism. In practice, the United States violated its own established principle of classic COIN in Somalia not long ago but it had little alternative to prevent the takeover of the extremist movement.

Within the Horn of Africa, the Djibouti base quickly assumed an active hand in combating Islamist insurgents bent on fashioning Taliban-style theocracies in the parched lands to its west. Thus it served as a springboard to counterattack militants threatening Somalia as it plunged into instability. Virtual chaos prevailed in Somalia since the 1991 coup toppled Siad Barre, the country's dictator since a 1969 military takeover. Washington briefly intervened into Somalia in mid-1992 at the head of the United Nations relief mission to feed the starving and destitute population. The humanitarian relief saved hundreds of thousands of destitute Somalis from death. The United States withdrew the bulk of its 28,000 troops starting in early 1993 and officially turned over further food distribution to the United Nations in May. Due to the State Department instigating an elementary form of nation-building, the U.S. military forces fell victim to "mission creep" moving from straightforward food distribution to policing missions to bring reconciliation among the warring clans.<sup>50</sup> This militarized diplomacy culminated in the 3 October 1993 urban battle in the streets of Mogadishu, as noted on page 26.

Over the next decade, Somalia descended into anarchy as rival warlords fought turf battles to establish tyrannical fiefdoms in which to shakedown the populace for bribes or ransom. A spate of flawed and short-lived governments came and quickly passed from the political scene without leaving a trace of order or reconciliation. Various extremist groups, some with alleged links to Al Qaeda, jockeyed for power against venal warlords. Jihadism became especially associated with *al-Ittihad al-Islami* (AIAI—the Islamic Union), a band of Wahhabi militants who killed, coerced, and intimidated in the cause of establishing an Islamic emirate in the dusty country. Later AIAI disappeared as an identifiable organization in Somalia, a not uncommon occurrence among radical groups in the Horn.<sup>51</sup> One Al Qaeda-affiliated cell facilitated the 1998 bombings of U.S. embassies in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam. Later militants from the same cell attacked a tourist hotel on the Kenyan coast in 2002 and attempted to shoot down an Israeli charter plane with missiles. From Somali bases, other jihadis, connected to Al Qaeda and funded by Islamic charities in the Arabian Peninsula, staged terrorist attacks

inside Ethiopia. In response, Addis Ababa labeled the Somali government as complicit in the raids and backed the formation of opposition factions within Somalia.

Somalia's turmoil hastened its neighbors to hold talks in Kenya about forming a new governing coalition to avert a political and human catastrophe that might engulf them as well. The resulting entity called itself the Transitional Federal Government (TFG). It constituted the fourteenth government formed since General Siad Barre's ouster. The U.N.-backed TFG, at first stationed in Kenya, relocated not to Mogadishu but to the southern town of Baidoa in June 2005. The new governing body considered the capital too violent for its headquarters; instead it took up residence in the hardscrabble town 150 miles away. Once on Somali soil, the TFG encountered stiff resistance from Islamic movements that despised its moderate, secular political orientation. The extremist fighters soon placed the TFG in precarious circumstances.

### **U.S. Counterterrorism through an Indirect Approach**

For the United States, the prevailing chaotic conditions initially opened the way for clandestine counterterrorism operations. These antiterrorism exertions depended less on working with and building up political faction leaders than on establishing contacts with knowledgeable informants. The CIA relied on former military and police officials in Somalia for information and assistance in identifying and removing terrorist fugitives. Developing this local counterterrorism capacity dovetailed with a variant of the Indirect Approach strategy. Rather than U.S. military personnel building local alliances and training surrogate forces, CIA operatives dealt with anti-Islamist warlords and other opponents of the violent extremists. The covert officers made contact with and payments to their allies-for-hire. These methods led to the apprehension of several jihadis. Among the highest level terrorist was Salim Ahmed Hemed (a.k.a. Issa Tanzania), who helped coordinate the attack on the Paradise Hotel in Mombasa, Kenya in November 2002. Militiamen loyal to a pro-American faction leader arrested Salim Hemed in Mogadishu and handed him over to U.S. agents, who placed him behind bars in Afghanistan. Other terrorist facilitators were similarly captured and turned over to U.S. custody.<sup>52</sup>

By blending into the background, U.S. intelligence agents tracked down and took terrorists off the streets by getting locals to seize or assassinate

suspects. To locate Al Qaeda fugitives, the United States made common cause with Somali warlords. These espionage operations demanded detailed intelligence and payoffs. Like police officers, undercover operators needed informants. The behind-the-scenes involvement sought to minimize the negative reaction inside Somalia and outside from other states, which bristled at any American direct intervention in the affairs of Islamic nations. In carrying out this objective, the counterterrorism campaign, however, contributed to the prevailing conflicts among warlords, jihadi elements, Al Qaeda militants, and Ethiopian security forces, which carried out their own manhunts against Somali rebels originally from Ethiopia. Reconciliation, let alone stability, fell by the wayside in the pursuit of terrorist masterminds and facilitators.<sup>53</sup>

The breakdown of governance in Somalia, in fact, created a political vacuum and left a near-free fire zone among contending factions. Frequent murders and abductions of locals or foreigners for ransom went not only unsolved but also unattributable to specific assailants. In this deadly atmosphere, several Somali sources, some working for the transition government and/or U.S. counterterrorism units, met untimely ends in back-alley shootings as the rate of violence accelerated by late 2004. This dirty war of reciprocal killings formed a backdrop to the political maneuvers and the rise of extremist forces. Counterterrorism in this instance blew back on any long-range hopes for a semblance of stability and normality returning to Somalia.

Bribing warlords for tips on terrorists, nevertheless, flopped as a strategy to defeat the enemies of the U.N.-backed governments within the volatile nation. The paid-off warlords by 2006 turned out to be a bad bet because they and their teenage henchmen terrorized the populations, thereby gaining converts for the Islamist militias. Ordinary citizens and business owners yearned for peace, tranquility, and freedom to move about without constantly paying bribes to thugs.<sup>54</sup> As a counterterrorism tactic, the cash transfers for information about shady types or taking terrorists into custody was an effective tool. But as a COIN method to “dry up a swamp,” instead it aligned the United States with unsavory figures. Clan warlords and former military figures were unsuitable for a hearts-and-minds program to cope with a spreading insurgency that capitalized on many people’s hunger for peace and stability, even though they rejected the militiamen’s extremist views of Islam. One authoritative study noted: “The strict, *Wahhabist* practice

of Islam in neighboring Gulf States was largely unknown in Somalia and considered foreign to Somali culture.”<sup>55</sup>

By early 2006, hard-line Islamist groups gained popularity by establishing Islamic courts to try warlords and their teenage assailants who they held responsible for peace-breaking and shaking-down the populace for money. The Islamists also raised the volume on their anti-Western rhetoric and assassinated several officials, business owners, and peace advocates. Their rough justice brought a tenuous stability that appealed to average people and merchants, who were frazzled and fatigued by long bouts of warlord-

*Somalia appeared headed for a Taliban-styled regime in the first decade of the 21st century.*

ism, corruption, and intimidation. The CIA’s funding of anti-Islamist warlords fell short of halting the extremists from tightening their grip on the country.

Somalia appeared headed for a Taliban-styled regime in the first decade of the 21st century.

Somalis looked for strong rule, no matter how repugnant its values were, to counter the banditry and lawlessness that prevailed even within Mogadishu. These Hobbesian conditions bred receptivity for the order imposed by the Islamic Courts Union (ICU), a coalition of hard-line and moderate religious factions. The Islamic Courts movement took root in the southern reaches of Somalia and even in some neighborhoods of the capital by 2005. These courts filled the political vacuum, and they rigidly enforced *shari’a*, or Islamic law, on their subjects. They meted out severe justice to transgressors of these legal and religious codes that forcefully imposed a modicum of law and order in their jurisdictions. They also won converts to their governance by setting up charities and schools.<sup>56</sup> Less appealing were strict policies by the Islamic Courts and their pitiless militias, which enforced the rigorist view of Islam. They shuttered cinemas, barred people from watching the soccer World Cup, and held public amputations or stonings of violators of their stark religious views. The loosely gathered courts movement was also populated with opportunists who just wanted to make money or enjoyed terrorizing the population. Still others wanted an end to the constant turmoil. The clan lords, albeit on the defensive, fought back against their religiously motivated foes. Indeed both sides attracted freelance gunmen who aligned themselves for a salary and a daily supply of *khat*, a leafy stimulant widely chewed by Somalis.<sup>57</sup>

An assortment of warlords and their clans formed an opposition front to the ICU militants. The Alliance for the Restoration of Peace and Counter-Terrorism (ARPCT) received clandestine help from the United States. In return, ARPCT went after Al Qaeda fugitives on behalf of their U.S. financiers. Charges and countercharges flew back and forth over whether the ICU harbored Al Qaeda operators or whether the ARPCT gimmicked accusations just to gain U.S. assistance. The Pentagon squarely came down on the side of its allied warlords. It offered the alliance chieftain as much as \$4 million for the capture of such Al Qaeda leaders as Tariq Abdallah (a.k.a Abu Talha al-Sudani). Among the high-value figures handed over to the U.S. authorities was Gouled Hassan Dourad, who headed a Mogadishu-rooted network that operated in support of Al Qaeda.<sup>58</sup> The CIA-allied proxies responded to the cash bounties by pursuing the terrorist fugitives. ARPCT also fought the Islamic militias in Mogadishu's rubble-strewn streets in early 2006. In June the Islamic militants, nevertheless, swept over the holdout sections of the capital, putting the alliance warlords to flight. The Islamist victory also dashed plans for a return of a parliamentary government that had developed across the border.

International mediation led to the formation of TFG in neighboring Kenya. This TFG offered the only prospect for a somewhat inclusive and broad-based ruling framework, at least until stability permitted the drafting of a constitution, elections, and the seating of a democratic government. But it also suffered from near-fatal flaws. Formed in October 2001, the TFG derived from a 275-member parliament, which elected Ethiopian-backed warlord Abdullahi Yusuf Ahmed. Any meddling by Addis Ababa made Somalis bristle at their archenemy and its perceived protégés. Thus Ahmed was distrusted as an Ethiopian stooge.

Functioning from Baidoa since 2005, the TFG appeared doomed by the sudden victory of the Islamic Courts in Mogadishu. The Islamic militias seemed capable of destroying their political rivals in Baidoa. Moreover, the TFG was deeply divided among its members. The transitional parliament itself was made up of warlords, some of whom profited from the absence of central authority. Moreover, NGO officials charged that some warlords adopted a counterterrorism stance just to gain American funds. Some transitional government officials accused the United States of undermining the TFG by clandestinely financing the anti-Islamist chieftains who disrupted the country. U.S. officials countered that the Pentagon disbursed no weapons and

deployed no American troops in Somalia at the time.<sup>59</sup> Other than handing out cash, the United States had few options to halt the spread of Islamist groups in Somalia or to bring justice to Al Qaeda fugitives. Moreover, arms and funds poured into the ICU from sources in Saudi Arabia, Yemen, and Eritrea.<sup>60</sup> The inflow of arms and foreign fighters fueled the Islamic Courts takeover of much of Somalia. By mid-2006, it was poised to crush its rivals.

Amid its advances on the ground, a power struggle broke out within the Islamic Courts ranks. Sheik Hassan Dahir Aweys emerged as the leader, displacing more moderate figures who expressed a willingness to work with the West. By contrast, Aweys declared that only a purified Islamic state was the answer to Somalia's problems. He publicly proclaimed that Allah would forgive him for spilling the blood of any foreign peacekeepers who ventured onto Somali soil. His past deeds offered cold comfort to the United States, which favored moderate figures. He occupied the vice chairmanship of *al-Ittihaad al-Islamiya* (Islamic Union or AIAI), a movement designated by the U.S. Department of State as a terrorist group linked to Al Qaeda.<sup>61</sup> From his new post, Aweys lost little time in calling for holy war as his extremist army marched across the countryside, gobbling up people, assassinating opponents, and absorbing local militias into its ranks. Clearly, no internal force stood in the way of the Islamic Courts conquest.

### **The U.S.-Supported Ethiopian Intervention**

Baidoa, seat of the TFG, recoiled in fear of being overrun by the Islamist militants. Rather than unity, the fear broadened the political fissures among clans and politicians in the transitional parliament. Paralyzed and impotent, the Baidoa government appeared on verge of being swept away. Likewise, the onrushing Islamic militias sparked apprehensions of a wider conflict throughout the Horn. Their seizure of Baidoa could encourage Greater Somalia adherents, reigniting separatist, ethnic, and sectarian factions within Ethiopian territory, rekindling another round of warfare between Eritrea and Ethiopia, or dragging Kenya and Djibouti both with ethnic Somali populations into the fray. Beyond the immediate region, Libya, Syria, and Eritrea reportedly funneled arms and funds to the ICU. By late 2006, official reports acknowledged that Ethiopian advisors or troops had stolen across the border for several months to train TFG recruits or to fight directly the advancing Islamic Courts militia.<sup>62</sup>

Ethiopia, a country with a deeply-rooted Christian identity (but with nearly half of its people Muslim), worried about the rise of militant Islam in neighboring Somalia. Also, Ethiopia was plagued by Muslim separatists in its eastern Ogden province. Encouraged and resupplied by the United States, Ethiopia decided to deploy troops in Baidoa so as to prevent the capture of the transitional government. The TFG's dire straits also gave rise to international calls for peacekeeping force made up of African countries, but not from the neighboring states of Djibouti, Ethiopia, or Kenya, which many Somalis regarded with suspicion. Nearby states, in fact, had treated past Somali internal conflicts as openings for proxy wars. Eritrea and Ethiopia, which fought a 2-year war starting in 1998, each deployed troops into the Somali civil strife to back opposing sides at that time.

Now Addis Ababa went to the aid of the transitional government out of anxiety from the advancing Islamic Courts militia toward its border. Ethiopia feared that Somalia's borderlands would become permanent bases for its separatist enemies. Eritrea, on the other hand, lined up behind Somalia's Islamists as means to strike back at Ethiopia and as a Muslim counter to Christian Ethiopia. An Islamic bloc of states—Egypt, Libya, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, and Yemen—forked over money and arms to the Islamic Courts militias. They wanted the Islamists to take over the country regardless of their relations with the United States or of their concerns about emerging violent extremists in their midst. It was a classic example of beggar thy neighbor politically no matter the long-term consequences for yourself.

The influx of proxy forces, foreign weapons, and outside interference fueled international anxiety about a swelling regionwide vortex. In early December 2006 the U.N. Security Council, with Washington's urging, voted to send peacekeepers to Somalia to restore order and to ensure the survival of the TFG. In response, the Islamic Courts pledged to greet the Blue Helmets with holy war. In the weeks that followed, the Islamic clerics in Mogadishu unleashed their militiamen who drove pickup trucks bristling with machineguns, mortars, and small antiaircraft guns. They descended on Baidoa's puny defense perimeter.

Adopting the Indirect Approach, the United States looked to Ethiopia to deal with the crisis, since Washington was already tied down in Iraq and Afghanistan. Direct military intervention in another Muslim country ran counter to good sense also.<sup>63</sup> The United States had few realistic options to block what it perceived as a near certainty of a Taliban-like government



coming to power in Somalia. Such a prospect conjured up thoughts of terrorist havens in Africa, Al Qaeda figures roaming throughout the Horn from bases in Somalia, and yet another active front in the global insurgency against violent extremism. Washington, therefore, turned to Ethiopia to undertake the heavy lifting within Somalia in late December 2006. For years the United States had quietly trained Ethiopian military forces. Pentagon officials voiced their opinion that “American commandos and the use of the Ethiopian Army as a surrogate force to root out operatives for Al Qaeda” offered a “blueprint.” The Somalia operation served as a formula for use in “counterterrorism missions around the globe.”<sup>64</sup> The reliance on Ethiopia, nevertheless, soon backfired in this crude application of surrogate forces harnessed to U.S. policy.

So it was that Ethiopian troops buttressed the transitional parliament’s loosely aligned fighting bands; their intervention was pivotal in the continued survival of the Baidoa government. Without the Ethiopian incursion, it seems likely that the TFG would have been pushed out of Somalia, if not destroyed. The intervention, however, first ignited international calls for a neutral peacekeeping force in Somalia, and then sowed the seeds of a Somali backlash to the Ethiopian presence. In the short term, the intensifying gun battles brought mediation from the European Union to start peace talks between the two warring sides.<sup>65</sup> But the negotiations petered out amid fire-fights and sniping. It turned out that these skirmishes were little more than a light breeze before the beating rainstorm. In the waning days of 2006, the Ethiopian Army staged a week-long blitz with jets, tanks, and attack helicopters, culminating in the capture of Mogadishu. Ethiopian troops backed the TFG’s lightly armed militiamen, who together swept through Somalia’s scarred seaside capital, easily routing the Islamic Courts movement after its 6-month governance. The Pentagon shared intelligence with Ethiopians and passed munitions to Addis Ababa as part of its indirect involvement. Reports circulated that small numbers of U.S. SOF were also on the ground to help the advancing Ethiopian columns.<sup>66</sup>

The Islamic Court foot soldiers melted away, shaved their beards, stashed their rifles, and vanished into the neighborhoods. The rough order imposed by ICU also evaporated as murder, rape, and forced bribes returned. Heavy casualties inflicted on the Islamic fighters, nevertheless, ushered in an uneasy calm. Powerful clans like the Hawiye, which had backed the Islamist militants in Mogadishu, lent only lukewarm support to the transitional parliament,



dominated by the Darod clan, and condemned the Ethiopian interference. While pockets of Mogadishu residents welcomed the Ethiopian-transition government forces, most Somalis viewed the Ethiopian Army with abiding antipathy. The two countries fought bloody border wars in the past. Their shared, unmarked boundary was the scene of recurrent skirmishes. The Somalis religious differences with their occupiers further exacerbated the fear and loathing toward the Ethiopians. For its part, the Ethiopian Army promised to withdraw quickly.<sup>67</sup> Remnants of the Islamic militias drifted toward the town of Kismayo on Somalia's southern coast, while others melted into population of the capital. Addis Ababa declared that its military incursion was temporary; it called for international peacekeepers to police the uneasy calm.

In the baggage trains of the Ethiopian Army, the TFG rode into Mogadishu and set up a government—the first internationally credible Somali governing body in 15 years. Elements within the TFG, however, harassed and looted the population. The new transitional prime minister, Ali Mohammed Gedi (a former veterinarian) appealed for peace and demanded surrender of weapons to the authorities.

Countless armed men initially traipsed through the streets, however, and stayed loyal to their clan warlords. During the following weeks, weapons went out of sight but not out of reach. Some clan elders concluded that the Islamists were a lost cause and made peace with the TFG. Others bided their time, waiting for the inevitable changes so frequent in Somalia's history.

In the south, Ethiopian troops and transitional militia closed in on the Islamists remnants, who first congregated in the town of Kismayo and then fled southward. Kenyan officials sealed their border against fleeing Islamist militiamen. For their part, the Islamists scattered into the bush and vowed to carry on a guerrilla war against their pursuers. They called for a global jihad against Ethiopia. Only a few hundred fighters, most from Eritrea, answered the plea.

Washington closely watched the unfolding developments in the Horn of Africa country. It worried that the military tide might be reversed in the perennially topsy-turvy political landscape. A return to power by the ICU almost certainly presaged a sanctuary for fugitive Al Qaeda operators and for other terrorist networks. As it were, the retreating Somali Islamists still sheltered terrorists wanted by the United States for the embassy bombing and other attacks in East Africa.

## The Intervention Backfires

The drawbacks to this clumsy application of the Indirect Approach quickly manifested themselves. The unpopularity of the Ethiopians in Somalia and the fragility of the TFG presence in Mogadishu afforded little lasting prospect for stability, let alone a pro-American government in Somalia. The United States swung into action. It immediately authorized a \$17 million aid package to the new Somali rulers. The Pentagon sailed ships from the Fifth Fleet, berthed in Bahrain, to expand patrols off the Somali coastline to block suspects escaping to Yemen. The White House cranked up diplomatic efforts for an all-African peacekeeping force within Somalia to protect a precarious government in the battered capital and relieve the unpopular Ethiopian Army of its occupation. It hoped that the African Union—a continental forum that developed in 2002 from its failed predecessor, the Organization of African Unity—or separate African countries could be persuaded to dispatch peacekeepers. Thus the White House looked to another indirect presence to displace the Ethiopian soldiers.

In Brussels, the U.S. representatives attended the Somali Contact Group (made up of African and European countries with the United States) meeting in early January 2007. Along with European and African diplomats, their American counterparts took up again the need for a unity government in Somalia and for an African peacekeeping presence. The 6-month-old Somali Contact Group met with a renewed urgency because of the dramatic changes in Somalia, brought about by the Ethiopian intervention and the TFG relocation to Mogadishu. The mini-summit resulted in no breakthroughs. Uganda alone offered to send in 800 peace soldiers; however, other African states hesitated, despite the approval of the African Union and the United Nations for a continental stabilization contingent in the war-torn country. The piecemeal withdrawal of Ethiopian Army units in late January heightened apprehensions of a return to anarchy. It would not be until March that African peacekeepers began to land in Somalia. Despite international goodwill, nothing changed on the ground. In short, Somalia stayed on the edge of the abyss. Indirectly, the United States worked through the African Union, which aimed at projecting continental security and stability. However, its member countries trembled at the prospect of casualties waged in a foreign war at American insistence.

Washington also urged negotiations between the transitional government and moderate members of the Islamist movements, who were not viewed as terrorist abettors. These deliberations, the U.S. officials argued, must also engage leaders of powerful clans. Brokering stability through mediation and peacekeeping troops, nevertheless, ran aground of realities among the new masters in Mogadishu. The recently arrived TFG rulers in Mogadishu resisted negotiations with their detested and distrusted foes. And African Union members were reluctant to deploy their troops in the lawless state. The diplomatic setbacks notwithstanding, the U.S. State Department pressed ahead in the following months to work indirectly through others—the Ethiopians, the TFG, and the African Union—to secure the shaky country.

The United States played a more active, if indirect, role in transforming Somali politics. From behind the scenes, it quietly aided Ethiopia's offensive into Somalia. It replenished spent munitions and supplied intelligence, equipment, and weapons. It also used Israel—a long-term ally of Addis Ababa—to coordinate Ethiopian needs and tactics. America's discreet hand in ousting the Islamic Courts militias from power stemmed from the attempt to not anger Saudi Arabia. The Saudis, in spite of their government's campaign against Al Qaeda within the desert kingdom, poured in millions of dollars to back the Islamists in Mogadishu. In the spring when African Union peacekeepers set foot in Somali, the State Department hired DynCorp International, which worked on U.S. contracts in Iraq and Afghanistan, to help the African Union soldiers. The private company trained, equipped, and transported troops under its initial \$10 million contract in the east African state.<sup>68</sup>

America's role briefly became more overt when an air strike took place in southern Somalia, near the Kenyan frontier. A U.S. Air Force AC-130 gunship at least twice pounded suspected Al Qaeda operatives long believed to be hiding among the ICU. The Ethiopian intervention flushed out the Al Qaeda fugitives, making them a vulnerable target for airborne strafing. Using bases and airstrips in Kenya and Ethiopia, a special operations unit made tactical sorties into Somalia against Al Qaeda figures. Specialized troops also went onto the ground in southern Somalia to determine who was killed in the airstrikes on terrorist fugitives.<sup>69</sup> For years the Pentagon trained Ethiopia in counterterrorist operations, including the African country's special forces named Agazi Commandos who participated in the Somali intervention. To

project control of the campaign's conduct, the Somali officials stated that they authorized the shelling when CIA and Ethiopian intelligence confirmed the location of the Al Qaeda operatives in Ras Kamboni, a remote fishing village near the Kenyan border. The 7 January 2007 strike reportedly killed Aden Hashi Ayro, an Islamic Courts commander trained in Afghanistan. Later, Ayro surfaced in Mogadishu but died in another U.S. airstrike in 2008, as is described in subsequent paragraphs.

All this cloaked U.S. intervention was not just about killing terrorists. Through American intercession, Sheik Sharif Sheik Ahmed, the second-highest-ranking Islamic Courts leader, was spared and provided safe passage to Kenya for a future political role, as will be subsequently narrated.<sup>70</sup> American and Somalis recognized the importance of Ahmed—a political centrist—for the future of the Horn country. Considered a moderate, Ahmed is currently the president of Somalia. Because of his more tolerant views, the al-Shabaab (“youth”) movement, an extremist organization, is in open rebellion against the Ahmed government.

### **The Somali and Afghan Interventions Compared**

In some respects the Somali case resembled America's Afghan invasion 6 years earlier. Coming right on the heels of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, the United States unleashed a coordinated counteroffensive against Afghanistan's Taliban regime for sheltering Osama bin Laden and his associates. That offensive relied on the Northern Alliance (a collection of mostly non-Pashtun peoples and disgruntled warlords) as the surrogate source of manpower on the ground. They were harnessed, financed, and assisted by Special Operations Forces and CIA agents. By one account, only “110 CIA officers and 316 Special Forces personnel” were initially deployed.<sup>71</sup> This lean American force leveraged a much larger militia of several thousand to overthrow the Taliban. As the third leg of this innovative approach, the U.S. Air Force along with carrier-based U.S. Navy jets furnished pinpoint bombing attacks with satellite- or laser-guided bombs. The combination high-tech airpower, low-tech but highly motivated ground forces funded, supplied, and guided by U.S. elite personnel routed the Taliban.<sup>72</sup>

It was an astounding military victory achieved decidedly on the cheap for the United States. By spring 2002, 6 months after the assault, the United States spent only \$12 billion and lost about a dozen American lives. The Northern Alliance lost hundreds of its militiamen. Taliban casualties numbered some

20,000. In many ways the intervention phase was a textbook case for the offensive deployment of surrogate forces and SOF to topple a regime.<sup>73</sup> It did, however, embody negative side effects. Some of the anti-Taliban warlords and militia commanders were placed on the CIA and SOF payrolls. Understandably, the U.S. ground forces and agents turned to the chieftains, who defeated the Soviets, as allies against the Taliban mullahs. But later the warlords traded on their newly burnished reputations as U.S. allies, to gain senior positions in the post-Taliban government that furthered the nexus between authority and drug corruption that plagues the current Hamid Karzai government. Money from the opium trade also fuels the insurgency, funding attacks on American, NATO, and Afghan forces.<sup>74</sup> To cut the linkage between Afghan drug traffickers and Taliban insurgents, the Pentagon announced in 2009 that it placed major drug dealers on its target list to be captured or killed. Thus the U.S. military is undoing one of its earlier calculations behind the initial Indirect Approach in Afghanistan.<sup>75</sup>

Other Afghan problems stemming from the U.S.-installed government burst on the pre-election scene in mid-2009, which highlighted the difficulties of operating within the Indirect Approach. Allegations of governmental indifference to corruption among its uppermost officials should remind exponents of the Indirect Approach that outside forces seldom get to pick their host-nation's leadership. Washington and its NATO allies shared concerns about the Afghan president's deal-making with former militia commanders and his forging ethnic alliances reliant on patronage to preserve his power. It recoiled as well at insufficient bureaucratic competency and coherence emanating from the Kabul government to complement the COIN being waged just outside the capital.<sup>76</sup> Widespread charges of election vote-rigging and ballot box-stuffing served to further delegitimize the ruling government. When a host government lacks political legitimacy, it hampers the effectiveness of the Indirect Approach. The SOF community needs no reminding that U.S. forces depend on their host countries for policies to further the prosecution of the COIN.

For all the success enjoyed by the innovative U.S. intervention during fall 2001, it did fall short as an antiterrorism operation to eliminate Osama bin Laden. First, the United States relied on Pakistan to slam tight its border with Afghanistan, thereby blocking the Al Qaeda leadership from retreat and eventual sanctuary in the remote Pakistani tribal borderlands. Even with a fully compliant and committed Pakistan military force, this was an

unrealistic strategy. The long, rugged 1,600-mile border separating Pakistan and Afghanistan is a porous frontier, not realistically sealable by Islamabad. Moreover, many elements inside Pakistan's defense and intelligence establishments were sympathetic to, if not actually supportive of, the Taliban regime and its star guest Osama bin Laden. Some Pakistani officers in the military and the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) sided with the Taliban's strict interpretation of Islamic codes and their usefulness in keeping arch rival India out of Afghan affairs. Betting on Pakistan to block or capture fleeing Taliban or Al Qaeda elements proved unwarranted by the facts.

Second, the Pentagon also leaned on the weak reed of the surrogate Afghan forces for a mission impossible. The pursuit of Osama bin Laden ill-fatedly depended on Afghan allies to close with and deal with the terrorist mastermind. As Dalton Fury recounted in his book *Kill Bin Laden*, it was a mistake to let the allied mujahideen form "the tip of the spear." This alliance "worked like a charm when we faced a common foe, the oppressive Taliban." But against bin Laden, "we might as well have been asking for them to fight the Almighty Prophet Mohammed himself."<sup>77</sup> In relying on the Indirect Approach, its limitations will be noted by SOF commanders in the field.

The aftermath of the U.S. forced entry into Afghanistan recalled the difficulties in Vietnam when the American commanders relied on ethnic minorities. To install a government in Kabul, Washington turned to their Tajik allies, who made up about 24 percent of the population, to run the Afghan armed forces, intelligence service, and secret police. The much larger ethnic majority, the Pashtun (who constitute some 42 percent of the populace), resented their rivals heading up so many key positions despite the fact that Hamid Karzai, the president, is a Pashtun. The political appointments hold present-day consequences. The Taliban draw the bulk of their recruits from the Pashtun, some of whom are aggrieved about the ethnic configuration of the ruling government.

Expecting NATO and the U.N. to consolidate America's victory over the Taliban by taking up Washington's occupation and peace-soldiering duties turned out to be another transitory illusion. In fact, the George W. Bush administration made few post-invasion plans for the occupation and governance of post-Taliban Afghanistan before the invasion.<sup>78</sup> In many ways, the astounding victory went unconsolidated as Washington's attention soon riveted on the war in Iraq. By early 2005, Taliban insurgents staged a comeback with newly borrowed tactics from Iraq—roadside bombs and suicide

attacks on both civilians and security personnel. The scattered outbursts of violence became more frequent as the Taliban fighters reestablished strongholds on Afghan soil or infiltrated across the Pakistan border. In time, the mounting attacks compelled the United States to pay heed to Afghanistan, deploy additional troops, and devise new strategies for defeating a resurgent Taliban threat.

In the Somali and the Pakistani cases, the reliance on local forces for the narrow mission of neutralizing terrorists or fugitive figures worked well. The collaboration between Pakistanis, Afghans, and the CIA has accounted for the arrest or deaths of numerous Taliban, Al Qaeda, and affiliated militants. Tipped off by informants seeking payoffs or revenge, the CIA lofted U.S. Air Force-flown Predators into the sky, tracked targets, and fired on-board Hellfire missiles at fugitives.<sup>79</sup> But as a method of defeating a spreading insurgency, it proved useful but inadequate.

In Somalia as well as in Afghanistan, Washington looked for multilateral organizations to assist its peacekeeping and nation-building endeavors. In Afghanistan, the light U.S. invasion force brought NATO countries in its train initially as peacekeepers and then, in time, counterinsurgents who acted as social engineers for constructing civil society to replace brigandage, violence, and insurgency with political stability and economic development. At the start of the U.S.-led intervention, the top civilians at the Pentagon planned on turning over a Taliban-vanquished Afghanistan to the United Nations for administering and to NATO for peacekeeping duties. The Pentagon wanted to preserve U.S. military forces for offensive, direct combat missions.<sup>80</sup> In the Somali case, Washington looked to the African Union, United Nations, and Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) in Eastern Africa, a regional grouping of states to deal with famine and ecological problems. These organizations proved better at dispensing U.S. funds than securing political stability.

## **Somalia's End-State—Violence**

Somalia's conflicts among warlords, clan chiefs, and militant factions discouraged outside powers from intervening. Washington had tried for over a year before the Ethiopian incursion in late 2006 to persuade African countries to deploy troops in the badly fractured nation. American diplomats sought African peace soldiers to accompany the TFG's return to Somali territory. But the Islamic Courts belligerency and maze of internal rivalries dissuaded



African capitals from serving as surrogates for Washington's policies. African troops from non-neighboring states offered the prospect of neutral forces in Somalia. Working through African governments was a more viable option than the unpopular Ethiopian army. Yet Washington assisted Addis Ababa when its forces moved into Somalia to defeat the extremist militias. Afterwards the brief hiatus set the stage for an African peacekeeping force backed by the United States, as its surrogate troops to preserve stability in Somalia. Washington convinced a few countries to fill the political vacuum as Ethiopia began to withdraw its soldiers so as to avoid being overextended in a hostile occupation. But never were there sufficient African peacekeepers on hand to ensue widespread peace.

On 5 March 2007, the first African Union peacekeepers arrived from Uganda to a classic Mogadishu welcome—hostile gunfire. Remnants of the ousted Islamist militias shelled the capital's airport as the 400-troop contingent off-loaded from U.S. aircraft. The Ugandans represented the vanguard of a hoped-for 8,000-man peace-building mission. At the time only a 4,000-strong unit had been pledged, mostly from countries friendly to the United States, such as Ghana, Nigeria, and Uganda. Later, Burundi fielded 800 soldiers but the total on the ground lagged behind even half of the pledged force. The gunfire greeting accompanying the arriving Ugandan peace troops served as a reminder of Somalia's past 15 years of strife and as a prologue of its future prospects. As always, innocent civilians paid with their lives and limbs as troops and militia peppered each other with shells. This proved just to be the opening salvo. Or, more accurately, it constituted just another salvo in the persistent conflict among the ICU militias, Ethiopian army, warlord irregulars, and the TFG's auxiliaries, in which the African Union and the United States joined the battle. From time to time, truces were brokered between the Ethiopian occupiers and the Hawiye clan elders. But shootouts and firefights broke out soon after the transitory agreements.

Another factor in the persistent conflict—the profit motive—enflamed the fighting and anarchy. Arms smugglers, teenagers for hire, and even genuine merchants benefited from Somalia's lawlessness and unregulated markets. The absence of laws and governance meant that tax revenues escaped lawful collection, businesses dodged regulatory codes, and opportunists all around took advantage of the free-for-all environment to fatten their wallets. Warlords with private armies took over the country's ports and airport; they charged user fees, making them a healthy return on no



real infrastructure investment. Duty-free importers and freelance landlords also cleaned up in the “chaos economy.” Over time, however, some business owners resisted the constant outlay of protection money to thugs. This new breed of merchants warmed up to the ICU, because its militias imposed order but did not confiscate their assets nor levy excessive taxes. Then the Ethiopian invaders and the transitional government threw a monkey wrench into the business practices of the former Mogadishu rulers.

When the transitional government authorities arrived in the capital, they took back public property and pocketed the fees. The loss of fees from the docks and airports angered the Hawiye business class, which benefited from the chaos and then the ICU control. Other clans also resented the Darod clansmen muscling in on their commercial enterprises. Since the transitional president, Abdullahi Yusuf Ahmed, hailed from the Darod, they were seen as interlopers to the Hawiye status quo. As a consequence, some of the Hawiye subclans threw their lot in with the ICU and other insurgents as they staged a counterattack on the Ethiopian troops and the transitional government occupiers of Mogadishu.<sup>81</sup> Squabbling over the meager spoils in Mogadishu accounted for just one of the problems of the new transition government. Another more deadly threat emerged from the extremist ranks.

The Islamic Courts fighters almost insistently sniped, ambushed, and bombed in the capital and its environs. Suicide car bombers hit the Ethiopian army barracks. These persistent attacks fell short of bringing unity to the militant ranks despite their sharing a common foe. Tensions within the ICU among its constituent factions burst forth when the Hizb’ al-Shabaah (the Party of Youth) split from the parent movement. Al-Shabaab’s practice of ultra-strict Islam was foreign to most Somalis. Led by Aden Hasi Ayro at the time, the uncompromising al-Shabaab group persisted in its attacks in Mogadishu and elsewhere not only on the TFG militia but also on any militants at odds with its puritanical religious views. Trained in Al Qaeda camps in Afghanistan, Ayro advocated a Taliban-style government in Somalia. He received arms and funds from Eritrea.

As the arch enemy of Ethiopia, Eritrea was only too happy to assist in compounding the Ethiopians’ troubles in pacifying Somalia. It was joined by others with the same goal. Meanwhile, Ethiopian battalions and transition government troops struggled to maintain order in a city awash with automatic weapons and rocket-propelled grenade launchers. Some 1,000 civilians died in the worst clashes in 15 years. The renewed violence also

emptied Mogadishu of some 350,000 people, who rushed out to escape the explosion in fighting. To make matters worse, foreign fighters from the Muslim world reportedly streamed into Somalia. Al Qaeda leaders Ayman al-Zawahiri and Abu Yahia al-Libi released video appeals on jihadist Web sites for mujahideen to rush to Somalia so as to wage an Iraq-style insurgency.<sup>82</sup> In time, transitional government officials announced the capture or death of militiamen from the Arabian Peninsula, North Africa, and even Asia. Even young men of Somali ancestry from Minneapolis in the United States joined the fight in the east African country.

In early April 2007 the State Department dispatched its top Africa hand to the embattled country in search of peace. Jendayi Frazer, the Assistant Secretary for Africa, spent 5 hours in Baidoa offering advice, verbal support, and \$100 million in aid to the transitional government. She also implored the transitional officials to reach out to recalcitrant clans and people who formerly backed the ICU in Mogadishu.<sup>83</sup> Out in the free-fire zone that had become Mogadishu, the Ethiopian troops, much better trained than the irregular militants, decimated the militia fighters. Ethiopian soldiers felled some 800 Islamists with artillery and sniper shots. They fielded tanks, mortars, and helicopters. Their heavy firepower turned the tide in the 3-week battle. But their intense artillery bombardments killed off any sympathy remaining among the residents.

Weeks after the U.S. envoy's visit, the so-called "Pearl of the Indian Ocean" eerily calmed down without any formal truce. Gradually a normalcy returned to Mogadishu amid the debris-filled roads and smashed buildings as a result of dueling artillery clashes. The city's refugees trickled back into their neighborhoods. The Islamic militants melted into the background, avoiding pitched battles. Instead they staged hit-and-run gun battles that shattered the semi-calm. For their part, the TFG and its Ethiopian defenders struggled to restore a modicum of order in the restive Indian Ocean port. To reassure the Somalis, Ethiopia declared its intentions to withdraw, but it feared an Islamist return to power if it went too fast. With that eventuality, a hostile Somalia would stir up Ethiopia's large Muslim minority against the Christian government. Thus Addis Ababa had become ensnared in Somali politics by backing Abdullahi Yusuf Ahmed, the transition president whose Darod clan refused to treat with its rival Hawiye clan, a mainstay of the ousted ICU. No one predicted a long or permanent peace in the leveled capital. Indeed sporadic attacks and counterattacks continue to this day.

No sooner had Mogadishu slipped into an unaccustomed stillness than another Somali danger arched high on foreign nation's radar screens. In 2005 two ships sailing off the coast of the Horn of Africa country fell victim to modern-day pirates in coastal craft. The next year 35 ships reported at-sea hijackings. By 2008 that figure jumped annually to over

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*In 2005 two ships sailing off the coast of the Horn of Africa country fell victim to modern-day pirates in coastal craft.*

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75 ships before decreasing due to an international naval presence off the Somali shore. The next year, 2009, saw 47 vessels captured and another 214 attacked at sea.<sup>84</sup> Using speedboats, global navigation devices, and satellite phones, the pirates overwhelmed the crews of luxury liners or cargo ships. They demanded ransom in exchange for release of the passengers and for safe passage of the vessels. Somalia's 1,880-mile, unpoliced coastline presented an inviting refuge to pirates. The country's location abutting critical shipping routes linking the Indian Ocean and the Red Sea also offered prime sites for sea banditry. The passage of time saw more rampant and brazen piracy that at last prompted NATO to dispatch a flotilla of patrolling warships. Formerly, impoverished fishing villages sprouted mansions built from piratical proceeds. The Somali coast, like the Gulf of Guinea and the waters off Indonesia, burst suddenly as among the world's most pirated sea. The ship raiders dwelt much more on ransom than religion and more on profits than politics. But they originated from the same turbulence that bred the country's internal strife.<sup>85</sup>

Also from the sea, U.S. warships cruised off the coast to interdict fleeing militants, especially foreign fighters, bound for the Arabian Peninsula. The vessels formed part of an international naval flotilla, known as Combined Task Force 150, made up of several countries. On at least one occasion, a Navy destroyer fired missiles at a band of Islamist fighters hiding out in the mountains of semiautonomous Puntland in June 2007. The barrage killed eight in a replay of a similar strike 6 months earlier against militants in southern Somalia. Almost a year later, March 2008, a U.S. submarine launched two Tomahawk cruise missiles into Doble, a town 4 miles from the Kenyan border. The intended target was Saleh Ali Saleh Nabhan, who intelligence agencies identified as one of the organizers of the 1998 bombings of the U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania.

In each missile firing, special ops troops played a role, either identifying targets, guiding missiles, or participating in postmortem evaluations on the ground shortly after the strikes. These earlier strikes proved ineffective against their intended high-profile targets, although other militants as well as civilians died in the explosions. The elusive Al Qaeda fugitives and many of the high-value leaders slipped the noose drawn by U.S. agents and troops. The Doble strike did touch off an anti-American demonstration by residents who chanted “Down with the so-called superpower.”<sup>86</sup>

But in late April 2008, another missile bombardment on a house in the central Somali town of Dusamareb, about 300 miles north of Mogadishu, killed Aden Hashi Ayro, the head of al-Shabaab, a highly ideological wing of the Islamist insurgency. Trained in Afghanistan, Ayro rose to prominence in the chaotic period before the transition government took shape. After the Ethiopians pushed aside the ICU in Mogadishu, he was blamed for introducing suicide bombings, roadside explosions, and other Al Qaeda tactics that took root in the impoverished land. At the time of his death, he was developing an Al Qaeda-linked network in Somalia. His unpopularity among moderate Islamic leaders probably led to his undoing. As in other American attacks, someone tipped off the U.S. military about the whereabouts of a terrorist suspect. Like Al Qaeda in Iraq, Ayro’s al-Shabaab faction cultivated enemies within Muslim ranks for its indiscriminate killings among the general population.<sup>87</sup> Also like bin Laden’s network, it attracted foreigners to its banners.

Unlike the Indirect Approach in the Philippines (discussed below), the U.S. military assumed a hands-on kinetic posture to eliminate terrorists and their abettors on Somali soil. Manila, by contrast, kept the American advisors in a strictly demarcated noncombat role. Somalia’s feeble sovereignty and dependent transitional government ruled out a similar arm’s-length strategy. Allowing U.S. forces a free hand has also been explained as a practice of the Abdullahi Yusuf Ahmed government, which itself waged a bloody war to do away with political and business rivals.<sup>88</sup>

Missile strikes against Al Qaeda operators represented a tiny cause of Somalia’s persistent turmoil. The transition government failed to reconcile its rivals, alienated population sectors such as merchants and business owners, and lacked funds to pay its own soldiers, who in turn stole food and merchandise from shop owners. The United Nations World Food Program

regularly ran short of handouts. Its aid workers faced the most dangerous life of any place on the planet. They were shot or kidnapped for ransom. The warlords, insurgents, and hordes of young men bearing arms to earn a wage completed the portrait of a failed state. In fact, it hardly resembled a state at all, rather a lawless space of some 9 million people lumped between its neighbors and the Indian Ocean.

A peace agreement in June 2008 between the transitional government and one of the moderate Islamic factions brought just a brief respite in the ongoing battles. The talks leading to the deal were boycotted by U.S.-listed terrorist Sheik Hassan Dahir Aweys, the former radical Islamist leader of the ICU, and then the extremist Hisb al-Islam faction allied with al-Shabaab. In fact, al-Shabaab and other Islamic militias continued to roll up territory in the south central part of the county. Within their bailiwick, the Islamic clerics meted out *shari'a* rulings, such as the stoning of women adulterers, whipping dancers, amputating the arms of thieves, and the kidnapping of foreign aid workers. The Taliban-style rule in itself made outsiders wary of the radical leadership's receptivity to Al Qaeda. Was the anarchy within Somalia leading to another pre-9/11 Afghanistan replete with terrorism camps and Osama bin Laden-like plotters of mass death in the West? This fear drives U.S. COIN efforts in the Horn as well as in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Yemen, and the Philippines to deprive terrorist havens for attacks on the West.

The chaotic environment within Somali borders convinced American analysts that the country seethed with difficulties even too intractable for Al Qaeda. These military experts recounted Al Qaeda's struggles to build a coalition in 1993-1994 among militias. The complexity of clan politics and the fleeting transience of interclan alliances that confounded Western observers proved just as perplexing to Al Qaeda organizers. Financial costs were greater, according to outsiders, than Osama bin Laden's commanders anticipated due to high operational expenses. They noted that the absence of infrastructure that hampered antiterrorist forces also severely retarded Al Qaeda operatives who found travel physically demanding and dangerous from highway shakedowns for cash.<sup>89</sup> The sheer chaos seemed to ensure that no foreign organization could prevail for long in the Somali maelstrom. But home-grown extremists could voluntarily "franchise" themselves to Osama bin Laden's cause.

Somali extremists, indeed, announced ties existed with Al Qaeda in late August 2008. A top commander of al-Shabaab, which the State Department

designated a terrorist organization a year earlier, spouted off that “we are negotiating how we can unite into one” with Al Qaeda. Sheikh Muktar Robow added: “We will take our orders from Sheik Osama bin Laden because we are his students.” The Al Qaeda acolyte explained: “Most of our leaders were trained in Al Qaeda camps. We get our tactics and guidelines from them.” The U.S. Ambassador Michael E. Ranneberger seconded the assessment up to a point: “There are indications of a fairly close al-Shabaab Al Qaeda connection, though it’s not clear to what extent they’ve been operationalized.”<sup>90</sup> In al-Shabaab videos, the Kenyan Al Qaeda operative Saleh Ali Saleh Nabhan (aka Abu Yusuf) expressed his allegiance to Osama bin Laden: “My sheikh! The heart offers you thousand greetings combined with my love and humility.”<sup>91</sup>

Al Qaeda’s hierarchy reciprocated the significance of linkages to Somali insurgents. Aman al-Zawahiri and Abu Yahya al-Libi stated how critical Somalia had become.<sup>92</sup> The Horn country’s importance loomed larger as Al Qaeda looked for new theaters as its operations stumbled in Iraq during 2007. Home-grown groups in Somalia as elsewhere may become self-declared Al Qaeda franchises. What gave al-Shabaab and other radical Somali movements salience with Al Qaeda was their conflict with U.S.-backed Ethiopian forces. Al-Shabaab figures capitalized on the Ethiopian presence in the same way that Al Qaeda in Iraq initially benefited from the U.S. occupation after the ouster of Saddam Hussein.

A policy of reliance on Ethiopian forces produced serious disadvantages for the United States and moderate, secular movements in Somalia. The al-Shabaab movement and other extremist groupings used the presence of foreign troops on Somali territory as a rallying cry that appealed to wide segments among the population. Once Ethiopia withdrew its main ground units, the extremist rebels lost this ringing provocation against the Ahmed transition government, which at the time of this writing clings to power. Sheik Sharif Sheik Ahmed, as noted above, had been spared by American intercession and allowed to escape safely into Kenya in early 2007. Considered a moderate figure despite his leadership role in the ICU, Ahmed was elected to the presidency by the parliament in January 2009 following president Yusuf’s resignation after losing the confidence of the parliamentarians.

The United States has now turned to supporting President Ahmed as its new indirect posture to deny terrorist sanctuaries by bringing a semblance of order and peace to the Horn of Africa. In June 2009 Washington announced

its shipment of 40 tons of weapons to the Ahmed government hard-pressed by al-Shabaab insurgents who controlled much of Mogadishu. The U.S. government also provided funding to Kenya, Burundi, and Uganda to train Somali soldiers to combat the al-Shabaab threat. Additionally, Washington criticized Eritrea of supporting the Somali rebels—a charge the Asmara government denied.<sup>93</sup>

In Somalia, the Indirect Approach leans on a slender reed in a country battered by nearly two decades of anarchy. Not being a warlord, among so many warlords, leaves President Ahmed reliant on others for military forces to ensure his survival. Coming from a branch of the important Hawiye clan provides a basis for its endorsement. Free of earlier Ethiopian backing, Ahmed has much more credibility among his fellow citizens than his predecessor. His resistance to Ethiopian invasion and occupation stands him in good stead among Somalis. But his al-Shabaab enemies are resolute, crafty, and persistent against their former partner. If anything, the rise to power of Ahmed “infuriated the hardliners, who immediately labeled him a Western ‘puppet.’”<sup>94</sup> Furthermore, opposition to Ahmed succeeded in coalescing disparate movements into a new extremist coalition, the Hisbul Islamiyaa (Islamic Party), which allied itself to the al-Shabaab movement.<sup>95</sup>

With few cards to play in Somalia, Washington’s endorsement of the Ahmed government is a tactical maneuver of wagering that it can further American objectives without direct U.S. intervention against extremist foes. Its recent adoption of Ahmed as the lesser of evils is one of the shortcomings of the Indirect Approach—the United States sometimes has few choices in its allies. During her African tour in mid-2009, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton met with Ahmed in Kenya and pledged “additional funds in the coming months” to assist the stabilization of the war-torn country.<sup>96</sup> Thus America’s Indirect Approach went full circle from backing the Ethiopian surrogate intervention against hard-line extremists to befriending and funding one of the former extremist leaders, now viewed as a moderate political figure. Rather than singling out U.S. policymakers for criticism, the shift from backing the Ethiopian intervention to propping up the indigenous political plays demonstrated the kind of pragmatism, flexibility, and adaptability necessary to make the Indirect Approach work in highly volatile countries. Yet the long-term viability of an Ahmed government and even its reliability as a moderate authority are open to serious questions in the anarchic land. Thus the durability of this version of America’s Indirect Approach in the



Horn is also open to doubt at this juncture. The strategy may require further modifications to adapt to new circumstances.

### **Philippines: A Qualified Indirect Approach Model?**

Numbering about 7,000 islands, the Philippines are sharply divergent from the current scenes of low-intensity conflict in the Middle East and Africa. Located in the Pacific off the coast of East Asia, the Republic of the Philippines has one foot in the Asian landmass and another in the Western world due to its long Spanish colonization. Imperial Spain subjugated the archipelago during the 16th century after Magellan, the great naval circumnavigator, landed on the islands in 1521. The Spaniards united for the first time in the far-flung island chain stretching almost 1,000 miles from north to south. Their religion, culture, and economic order left a lasting influence on the Filipino populations. Spanish religious orders spread Catholicism down the lengthy archipelago except to the southernmost islands, where the earlier-established Islamic communities resisted the Christian missionaries' proselytizing. The colonists also established large estates for the production of sugar cane, rice, hemp, and coconuts. Over the span of centuries, Spanish rule brought neither adequate and balanced economic development nor self-government, let alone sovereignty. Not until American control at the tail end of the 19th century did the Philippines inch toward the modern world and eventual independence. Its path, however, was pockmarked with rebellion, conflict, war, and insurgencies that reach into the present time, with extremist Islamic movements and communist guerrillas.

Unlike either contemporary Somalia or 1960s Vietnam, the Philippines offer in many respects a textbook case study for how the Indirect Approach and surrogate warfare must be waged. The following description will unfailingly note the many positive practices of U.S. COIN practices. But the Philippine case study cannot become a one-size-fits-all template for other insurgencies. The island republic's political and economic circumstances, history, and relationship with the United States differ vastly from Somalia, Pakistan, Iraq, or Afghanistan. In most respects, the Philippines are an atypical case. Many Filipinos know the United States well. They have relatives living in America. Large numbers have served in the American armed forces. Their personal familiarity enhances and facilitates cooperation. The island republic possesses a functioning constitutional democracy, long and close relations with the United States, and the insurgents are confined to



southern islands, making it difficult for them to find cross-border sanctuaries in neighboring states. Indeed the nearby states cooperate with Manila and with each other in cracking down on terrorist networks and apprehending fugitives. In many other insurgencies, mutual assistance against insurgents within regions has often been lacking. Elsewhere, some states actively assisted their neighbor's insurgents or at least allowed them sanctuary. The United States, as an offshore neighbor, has played the dominant part in the improvement of the Philippine government's COIN against terrorists and insurgents. Because the U.S. Indirect Approach has borne fruit in the Philippines, its practitioners see their campaign as a readily applied model for other insurgencies.<sup>97</sup>

Every insurgency presents similar military and political characteristics; but in the last analysis, each is unique to other conflicts. No field practitioner can simply superimpose the COIN techniques and lessons of one insurgency over another to attain the same outcome. Warfare is far too complexly irreducible for template-like solutions. The Philippine case contains elements of an effective anti-insurgent campaign but because of its many natural and political advantages cannot become a paradigm for all other counterinsurgencies.

### **U.S.-Philippine History in a Nutshell**

American-Philippine relations have oscillated over the decades between the good, bad, and indifferent. During the Spanish-American war, Commodore George Dewey sank Spain's Pacific fleet and freed the Philippines from Madrid's three centuries-plus colonization. But rather than setting free the 7,000-island archipelago under a Filipino government headed by the independence fighter Emilio Aguinaldo, Washington hung onto the country when Spain ceded it to the United States, along with Guam, Puerto Rico, and Cuba (the latter of which became a sovereign state). Some Filipinos declared independence and proclaimed a republic in 1899. A guerrilla war broke out between Filipino insurgents and the U.S. Army that claimed the lives of over 200,000 islanders. Aguinaldo's capture in 1901 failed to end the insurrection, which lingered on among the Islamic Moros in the southern island of Mindanao, despite a peace agreement in 1902.

Under American tutelage, the Philippines went from semicolonial status with its own legislature to a Commonwealth in 1935 with Washington's grant of more autonomy and a constitution approved by the island populace. Its new

status also envisioned a transitional phase in 1946, when the South Pacific nation would become independent. But the day after Japanese warplanes struck the U.S. Navy at Pearl Harbor, Japan invaded the islands. The Imperial Japanese Army defeated the tiny American garrisons at Bataan and Corregidor and expelled General Douglas MacArthur from the Filipino shores. General MacArthur reinvaded the islands in October 1944, and U.S. forces freed the Philippines from Japanese rule. Nearly 2 years later, the island nation attained its full sovereignty on 4 July 1946.

The United States, however, retained use of Subic Bay naval base and Clark air base under a 1947 agreement with the Philippine government. But as the agreement expired four decades later, the Philippine Senate, out of nationalistic impulse, rejected ratification of a new treaty to extend the U.S. military presence. Washington accepted Manila's decision and vacated the Naval Station at Subic Bay in 1992. The United States had already abandoned its Clark air base the year before when it was buried under volcanic ash from an erupting Mount Pinatubo. The loss of the naval facilities invoked feelings of ingratitude in the United States but the interlude fell short of disrupting military cooperation between the two countries. Even after independence, American military assistance was instrumental in checking the island republic's guerrilla enemies. Manila looked to American assistance in combating internal brush fire wars over the years.

For Washington's part, the Pacific islands were too geopolitically important to have them engulfed in instability. And for the Philippines, its self-imposed estrangement from the American military safety net came to a close with the rise of Islamic militancy in the country's southern islands. In 1999 the two countries entered into an agreement to formalize and limit their cooperation. This Visiting Forces Agreement governs the jurisdiction over U.S. personnel who commit civil crimes on Philippine territory. It also legally ruled out direct combat missions for American troops. Rather, the Pentagon honed in on building what it termed *counterinsurgency capacity* within the Philippine military.<sup>98</sup> This endeavor concentrated on rendering specialized training and transferring arms and equipment to Filipino armed forces.

Manila's arm's-length stance from dependence on U.S. troops for combat missions worked to the advantage of both countries. The Philippines avoided the reliance on American forces that might lead to undermining of the Indirect Approach. It also avoided political accusations of being an American appendage. For the United States the Filipino insistence lessened costs and

the size of its military footprint in the islands. This go-it-alone capacity and requirement marked a key distinction from the heavy U.S. military involvement demanded in immediate post-invasion Iraq and current-day Afghanistan.

## U.S. Counterinsurgency Returns to the Philippines

Even before 9/11 plane hijackings, the Pentagon carried on training missions with the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) to strengthen their capabilities against terrorists and insurgents. The Republic of the Philippines and the United States initiated the Balikatan (translated as *shoulder-to-shoulder*) military exercises in spring 2001, because earlier joint training operations had lapsed during the 1990s. In time, these joint maneuvers incorporated a large component of American humanitarian and civic assistance to the impoverished southern islands to alleviate the local grievances about the central government's neglect in building roads, bridges, wells, and harbors and in allocating health, dental, and veterinary services to the inhabitants. The reinstated military cooperation proved timely as the Islamic insurgent threat burst into the world's eye with terrorist strikes in New York, Bali, Madrid, and many other cities. The exercises and more importantly the continuing joint COIN collaboration between the two countries helped Manila beat back the insurgency.

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Just after the Balikatan 2001 exercises, the Defense Department furnished intelligence, equipment, and money in support of the AFP when an American missionary couple—Martin and Gracia Burnham—were taken hostage on 27 May 2001 by Abu Sayyaf (this name honors Afghan jihadi Abdul Rasul Sayyaf and means roughly The Bearer of the Sword). A Saudi Arabian businessman, Mohammed Jamal Khalifa, who married a sister of Osama bin Laden, may have helped found Abu Sayyaf in the early 1990s. His businesses and Islamic charity operated for a few years in the islands, where he allegedly channeled funds to extremists.<sup>99</sup> Afterwards he fled the island nation and met death a decade later in Madagascar.

An extremist faction, Abu Sayyaf perpetrated a campaign of thuggery, murder, kidnapping, and rape in the southernmost Philippine islands. Along with others the Burnhams were abducted from a resort on Palawan

and spirited across the Sulu Sea to hideouts on Basilan off the coast of Mindanao. Abu Sayyaf proclaimed itself an Osama bin Laden group. One of its leaders Aldam Tilao (who adopted the nom de guerre of Abu Sabaya (Bearer of Captives) was a principal figure behind the Burnhams' abduction. Under Tilao's guidance, the group behaved more like pirates than religious stalwarts. He hungered for personal notoriety and media attention, donning Oakley sunglasses and a raffish bandana for photographers.<sup>100</sup> Ultimately, this narcissism contributed to his death at the hands of the AFP. Put prior to his demise, he and Abu Sayyaf grabbed the press's attention.

A well-regarded reporter noted that the kidnappers were unfamiliar with much of the *Koran*, Islam's holy book, and only whimsically adhered to positive Islamic behavioral tenets. Seeing themselves as enjoying special status as holy warriors, they "sexually appropriated several of the women captives (who were taken with the Burnhams), claiming them as 'wives.'"<sup>101</sup> Historically, radicalized Islam as a political cover and enabler of terrorism was nothing new as its extremism saw wide usage among the Barbary pirates for centuries. Tilao, and other terrorist chieftains, have acted as Robin Hood figures by dolling out some of the ransom money from kidnappings to locals. But they have also interspersed their payments with large dollops of intimidation and mayhem to keep their charges in line.

The horrific events of 9/11 catapulted the barely visible Abu Sayyaf onto the Pentagon's terrorism radar screens. The kidnap-for-ransom gang's obscurity vanished as it was regarded as a regional branch of an international threat. President George W. Bush offered the Philippine President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo assistance against the abductors. U.S. military and CIA help followed. It played a role in the eventual cornering of the Abu Sayyaf hostage-takers, the death of its leader Abu Sabaya, the unintended killing of Martin Burnham, and the safe release of his wife Gracia. At the time, the U.S. deployment represented the second front, after Afghanistan, in the war on terrorism. To coordinate its low-visibility activities, the Defense Department established a Joint Special Operations Task Force–Philippines (JSOTF–P) to facilitate cooperation with Filipino military and to "wage peace" by heading off grass-roots grievances with medical and veterinary care and construction projects. The initiatives proved to be an antidote for the troubled island of Basilan. Long-standing grievances remain among the Muslim population due to the agitation of local activists and Manila's neglect, however.

America's side-door role against the Burnhams' captors exemplifies the behind-the-scenes, small-scale Indirect Approach it must play in its long-term struggle against violent extremism. The United States handed over surveillance intelligence, rifles, high-speed naval boats, and money to the Philippine marine corps and other units. As journalist Mark Bowden reported, the Burnham incident offered a model: "Because the enemy consists of small cells operating independently all over the globe, success depends on local intelligence and American assistance subtle to avoid charges of imperialism or meddling, charges that often provoke a backlash and feed the movement [of jihadism]." <sup>102</sup> This patient, shadowy part of training, guiding, and equipping others to fight, capture, and arrest terrorists has nothing to do with the Hollywood-style operations of popular special ops lore. By playing a supporting role—rather than a leading part—the SOF were more effective in the long run. Moreover, they kept a "Filipino face" on the COIN operations.

Pitfalls, nonetheless, surfaced in working hand in hand with indigenous COIN forces. The journalist Bowden called attention to the prospect that the Philippine troops "almost certainly murdered people standing in the way of their intelligence operation." <sup>103</sup> This practice is unfortunately an element of nearly all conflicts in which innocents have been abused, tortured, or even killed for being accused of collaborating with one side or another. Better training can reduce or even eliminate counterproductive behavior. The corruption, harsh treatment, or ill discipline of indigenous forces can unfortunately cause a backlash among locals against the U.S. advisors as well as native soldiers. As such, the behavior of America's in-country partners matters immensely for the success of the Indirect Approach.

The terrorist attacks on American soil intensified U.S. assistance to Operation Enduring Freedom—Philippines (OEF-P)—the planning for which started as the site of the Twin Towers still smoldered. Washington dispatched Special Operations Forces and CIA agents with cash and surveillance tracking equipment to help the Armed Forces of the Philippines, including unmanned aerial vehicles such as the Predator that could pick up campfires, hot food, and even human beings on its infrared cameras. The specialized military units passed along techniques for reconnaissance, patrolling, marksmanship, and medical care to their Filipino counterparts. The U.S. military command, which was back in the Philippines for a joint exercise with the AFP, wanted a SEAL team to conduct the hostage-rescue

raid, a type of operation particularly suited to the elite Navy commandos. The Philippine officers rejected the American offer, feeling it cast doubts on their competency as well as infringed on their sovereignty.

The AFP sometimes trod clumsily in pursuit of the Abu Sayyaf guerrillas who fled into the hills north of Zamboanga City on the southernmost peninsula of Mindanao. Moreover, the Philippine forces embodied fissures between the army and the marines which especially came to the fore when deciding on the rescue operation for the Burnhams and the other captives. The army prevailed over the seaborne infantry corps. But its botched raid resulted in the death of Martin Burnham and a Filipino nurse, traumatized Gracia Burnham, and enabled Aldam Tilao (aka Abu Sabaya) and other kidnappers to escape into the forest. The dismal outcome of the raid intensified the army-marine tensions, complicating the mission of the CIA agents and U.S. Special Operations Forces.

The Philippine marines got another chance when Tilao and his remaining band decided to flee the peninsula by sea. Through a tip-off, the marines, aided by the SEALs and CIA, intercepted the Abu Sayyaf boat off the Mindanao coast, killing Tilao and many of his gang. His death failed to inspire a widespread resurgent extremist movement to avenge the “martyrdom.” The Abu Sayyaf movement remains active, however, setting off bombs and staging ambushes on the contested volcanic island of Jolo, where the Philippine marines still battle militants.<sup>104</sup> The near invisibility of the American military presence with the SOF and CIA playing a discreet behind-the-scene part in support of COIN lessened animosities toward the United States. But Abu Sayyaf and other militant cells regrouped and struck again.

The larger movement for a separate Muslim autonomy as represented by the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) also persists as do other secessionist parties divided along ethnic lines but favoring some sort of Islamic state. As such, the struggle continues between Manila and its island populations. The Front and Manila governments entered into peace agreements from time to time. These arrangements exchanged limited autonomy to the MILF for a cessation of hostilities. In due course they broke down, and strife returned. U.S. forces were prohibited from participating in sweeps against MILF, because Washington did not view the Front as a terrorist network linked to Al Qaeda or Jemaah Islamiyah, an Indonesian terrorist movement connected with Osama bin Laden’s network. On the other hand, Abu Sayyaf reportedly enjoyed connections with both of these foreign terrorism outfits.

Jemaah Islamiyah members involved in the 2002 Bali nightclub bombing that killed over 200 people fled to Jolo, where Filipino forces chased them in the mountainous terrain.

Abu Sayyaf later suffered setbacks at the instigation of U.S. forces operating in the Philippines. Two of its leaders were killed in clashes with Filipino troops, who were tipped off by informants. The whereabouts of Khaddafy Janjalani, the group's head, and Abu Sulaiman (his real name Jainal Antel Sali Jr.), a senior leader, was divulged by half a dozen Jolo islanders. Later they shared in a \$10 million bounty paid by the U.S. government Rewards for Justice money but handed out by Filipino officials to keep the United States out of the picture. Janjalani took over the leadership of Abu Sayyaf from his brother and the network's founder, Abdurajak Abubakar Janjalani, after his death in 1998. Before Janjalani's physical elimination in 2006, this terrorist had been involved in the sinking of a passenger ferry that cost over 100 lives in 2004, plus many other killings and kidnappings.

The United States, for its part, intended to avoid being dragged into parochial struggles beyond its security interests. But as insurgent movements like the MILF splinter or spin off rogue factions that depart from truces and resort to terrorism, the United States may well be drawn into engaging them. Members of the Front did join with a resurgent Abu Sayyaf in attacks on Filipino troops on Jolo Island in August 2007.<sup>105</sup> The Republic of the Philippines also fought back against other insurgents including the New People's Army (NPA), the military faction of the Communist Party of the Philippines. The NPA fought a rural-centered insurgency within the archipelago, especially in eastern Mindanao, where it took advantage of the AFP's focus on Abu Sayyaf in the southern part of the island to revive its attacks.

Another reason for the lowered profile of U.S. personnel in the Philippine operations derived from the sensitiveness with which they came to their task. All the Americans underwent "cultural sensitivity training" that entailed seminars with community officials, Muslim clerics, and academicians even though they arrived on Basilan Island well versed in local mores. Squads of men, numbering about 12 highly trained members, were assigned to much larger Philippine units for training and advisement. These teams perceived their first mission to be one of establishing rapport with both their military counterparts and the local populations. Each member mingled and talked with people. Some spoke at forums to clarify intentions and to answer questions from the islanders. The teams contracted for food, laundry, and building



of bases from neighborhood businesses to give them an economic stake in their presence. Concerns were allayed. The Brasilan Provincial Council, among others, passed resolutions supporting the American deployment.<sup>106</sup>

On Jolo Island, the U.S. military showed animated films to children, who got a bottle of water and paper bag of popcorn in return for using hand sanitizer as the price of admission. Thus the young attendees got a lesson in sanitation along with a free movie seat. The unconventional methods formed part of the struggle to win hearts and minds against violent extremism by improving the lives of islanders. Gifts of plastic sandals, help with seaweed farming, and development of off-season mangos—all formed part of the COIN program. The Joint Special Operations Task Force–Philippines hosted the cinema and other civil operations to squeeze out sympathy for Abu Sayyaf and wherever possible complicity with political extremism. In discussing the social-service projects, Army Major Joseph Mouer stated: “I consider myself a diplomat with a gun.”<sup>107</sup>

The number of Americans, military and civilian, was less than 600 advisors. They were prohibited from direct combat roles by their Filipino hosts. Instead, they trained, advised, and transferred COIN equipment, encompassing night-vision goggles, special radar, heat-detecting cameras, and up-to-date radios. Fighting was left to Philippine troops. Civilians from the Agency for International Development helped out with improving crops and medical services. The SOF security enabled USAID, nongovernmental agencies, and even private businesses to set up shop.<sup>108</sup> For short spurts, U.S. Seabees, accompanied by U.S. Marine guards, landed in remote areas to build footbridges, water wells, piers, and helicopter landing zones. But they avoided impinging on Philippine sovereignty and feeding the flames of resistance to foreign interference. Abu Sayyaf threatened to kill the American “invaders” and promised to liberate the southern Philippines from Manila’s colonization and Christian domination. The SOF countered by minimizing its presence while maximizing the Philippine combat role.

The tiny American advisory presence, therefore, fell well short of the type of occupying army that so enraged opposition to the U.S. presence in Iraq after its invasion. By reducing its footprint within the Philippines, the Pentagon diluted charges that the Manila government was simply America’s puppet as it also downsized a convenient target for extremist networks to incite resistance. Despite a lowered American military profile, the threat of terrorism, insurgency, and instability persists in the Philippine southern



islands. A deployment of a few hundred U.S. personnel did not spark the Muslim separatist cause. That propensity for separatism long preceded the U.S. occupation at the end of the 19th century. Successively, the MILF and then Abu Sayyaf proclaimed secessionist aims interlaced with murderous behavior and piratical activities. Their violence poses a threat to American interests because the perpetrators see themselves as a branch of Al Qaeda rather than strictly a local separatist movement. As such, they are willing to extend safe havens to America's most deadly foes. Their violent deeds lend substance to their proclaimed goals. Within the Philippines some 400 people died (and a further 1,100 wounded) from terrorist attacks between 2000 and 2007, making the archipelago the deadliest nation in Southeast Asia.<sup>109</sup>

The necessity for the annual Balikatan military exercises between U.S. and Filipino forces remains a high priority for both nations. The SOF role of training and advising the AFP is unabated. This Indirect Approach serves as a model elsewhere. Direct warfare, such as commando raids and assault operations, remain a staple for some SOF units against bad guys. Yet the reverse side of the SOF coin lies with the crucial operations designed to evaporate terrorist breeding grounds and win over the loyalty of a populace. Humanitarian, financial, and civic backing form the primary orientation of these programs. They can include a training dimension of either local elite forces or civic personnel for reconstruction. While the distinction may be too pat at times, as engagements demand both types of forays, the indirect role of support for host-nation troops focuses on preempting a deteriorating political environment before it suppurred with an all-out insurgency. The campaign against terrorist networks, therefore, is a conflict requiring partners. Allies are needed to deny militants sanctuaries in their countries. It is a war of shadows, rather than American silhouettes, where U.S. forces stand out as unwelcome as strangers in a strange land reluctantly hosted by a hard-pressed regime. The opposition to an American presence—military or even civilian—is not unique to the Philippines. But the islands' colonial past and now vibrant democratic institutions render public outcries all the more powerful.

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## Unique Characteristics of the Philippine Scene

Despite the close working relationship between American and Filipino armed forces, not everyone in the Philippines is enamored with the U.S. presence. A variety of political parties, advocacy movements, and human-rights groups loudly protest the American military presence and the U.S.-Philippine cooperation especially the Balikatan military maneuvers. The Communist Party of the Philippines, its military arm of the New People's Army, the communist-led National Democratic Front, the Karapatan (human rights group), and the Bagon Alyansang Makabayan (an umbrella group), the National Alliance on Filipino Concerns, and others regularly stage demonstrations, hold rallies, and support individual activists who oppose Filipino-American military ties and the U.S. forces stationed on the islands. The Ban Balikatan movement opposes the American intervention as an infringement of the country's sovereignty. Some of the protests believe that the southern island requires genuine agrarian reform and industrialization and not humanitarian handouts by a neocolonial power.<sup>110</sup>

These political movements regularly call for investigations into alleged atrocities committed by the U.S.-trained Philippine army or back claims of alleged rape victims by U.S. personnel. Because the islanders enjoy much greater freedom and safety in a democratic country, the political scene is lively with an array of dissidents, protesters, and political constituencies, which rage at the United States and their own government for cooperating with the American neo-imperialist. The Filipino detractors criticize U.S. troops for being exempt from the visa regulations, vehicle registrations, and airplane and ship custom inspections of the island under the terms of the Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA). They protest that American buildings constituted permanent camps rather than temporary facilities, which violated a constitutional ban on permanent bases garrisoned by foreign powers. Other protestors hold that U.S. SOF have engaged in combat actions, an activity strictly prohibited by the Philippine Constitution, which also bars foreign troops fighting on Filipino territory. Despite Pentagon disclaimers about U.S. troops battling insurgents, the charges prevail in certain quarters.<sup>111</sup>

The opposition is not confined to gadflies on the fringe or to gaggles of political malcontents. Filipino legislators have called for hearings about the validity of VFA. Their plans include raising the constitutionality of the VFA before the country's Supreme Court. These senators opposed to the SOF

presence, especially at Camp Navarro in Zamboanga, contend that the VFA permitted Washington to obtain long-term *de facto* bases “without a treaty concurred in by the Senate.”<sup>112</sup> Because of the American colonial legacy in the Philippines, certain islanders deeply resent any U.S. military deployment, even one functioning as advisors and aid workers. Should history repeat itself, anti-American politicians could once again pass legislation expelling the U.S. military presence from the Philippines as happened in the early 1990s. This outcome will not bode well for the Indirect Approach.

Another particular political dimension distinguishes the Philippine conflict from other past and current insurgencies. Whereas in South Vietnam, Somalia, El Salvador, and other insurgency venues the host government depended on America underwriting for its very survival, the Manila government is not placed in similar jeopardy by its insurrectionists in the countryside. If anything, Manila has been long inured to rural warfare from its battles with U.S. forces for independence after the American Navy rid the archipelago of Spanish colonial rule at the end of the 19th century. The Japanese occupation during World War II saw the rise of a rural guerrilla resistance that simmered into the 1950s from the *Hukbalahap* (the People’s Army Against Japan) or the Huks. When the Sino-Soviet split took place in the late 1960s, the Maoist wing of the island’s communist movement formed the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP). The CPP organized a military wing in the New People’s Army to wage a Mao-like protracted people’s war that is still smoldering in some islands today. Because the NPA engaged in terrorism, extortion, rape, torture and murder, the United States and the European Union listed it as a terrorist network. Rural violence and insurgent movements have become an enduring factor in the Philippines national life, not altogether different from the situation in contemporary India, large sections of which remain beyond New Delhi’s sovereignty. None of the threats seemed immediately destined to topple the national government in Manila. But the Philippine governments’ ill-advised policies posed threats for the overall aims of Washington.

For the United States the existence of networks like Abu Sayyaf presented threats if they secured operating sanctuaries because of their global mission aimed at American interests. This state of affairs, paradoxically, placed American forces in the position of dependence on their host. If the U.S. relationship with the indigenous military suffered a setback or the Manila government lost control over its territorial space, violent extremists could

make gains at America's expense. For example, when an ally, such as Pakistan, entered into agreements with militant militias in the mid-2000s, the truce permitted the Taliban groups to refit and mobilize for cross-border raids in Afghanistan. By not pressing the attack on Pakistani militants, the Islamabad government's policies allowed terrorist havens to take root and endanger U.S. objectives in Afghanistan and perhaps beyond that mountainous country. Terrorist bases in Afghanistan, for instance, carried out the 9/11 terrorist attacks in Manhattan and suburban Washington. Not long ago Philippine policies opened the prospect for terrorist safe havens in the ungoverned spaces on Mindanao.

President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo entered into behind-closed-door talks with the MILF toward recognition of its autonomy on Mindanao during mid-2008.<sup>113</sup> The MILF started its insurgency in 1982 (but other separatist rebels started an earlier insurgency in 1972) with a goal of at least an autonomous state. The Arroyo administration agreed to surrender to the MILF "ancestral domain" over wide swathes of Mindanao territory, including 700 villages in return for vague promises of peace. Already in existence since 1996 was the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM), which fell under control of the MILF's chief rival, the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF). The MNLF is still one of Philippines active insurgent groups. President Arroyo proposed to expand the ARMM area into a new and larger entity and jeopardize the MNLF agreement. The Manila government discussed with the MILF the establishment of a new territorial unit known as the Bangsamoro Juridical Entity in southern Mindanao.

When the president sprang the news of the agreement with the MILF on an unsuspecting country, it set off protests. Many feared the balkanization of Mindanao into separate fanatical states. Some enclaves might fall under control of extremists who posed terrorism risks for the United States. Other entities could endanger the lives and livelihood of Filipino non-Muslims. The Philippine Supreme Court halted the real estate transfer when other Mindanao organizations challenged its legality. The MILF, true to form, reacted to the court ruling with murder and mayhem. Prior to the Arroyo autonomy pledge, Manila had entered into cease fire with the MILF in 2003. The MILF periodically broke the arrangement when it felt that the peace process was not moving in its favor. But the unsteady lull in violence benefited the MILF, because the agreement held at bay the U.S. Special Forces from helping the Armed Forces of the Philippines combat the MILF. In retrospect, both

the truce and the autonomy pledge undercut the United States in its efforts to dry up terrorist swamps.

Turning over acreage to militant movements is a prescription for trouble, as so alarmingly the world witnessed in a string of terrorist strikes hatched in Afghanistan. Ungoverned Somalia, in another illustration, is home to pirates who seize commercial vessels for ransom, disrupting legitimate commerce. Pakistan's truces with Taliban leaders gave them free rein and needed time for the insurgents to consolidate their hold on lightly governed swaths of territory in the northwestern reaches of the country. Still another example of possible political decisions by host countries adversely impacting American COIN operations comes from Afghanistan. In the run-up to the 20 August 2009 presidential elections, President Hamid Karzai announced that the U.S. military presence and international forces should be "based on a new contract" that would minimize civilian deaths, limit security searches of private homes, and decrease the number of Afghan detentions in jails without charges.<sup>114</sup>

After Afghanistan's August 2009 elections, President Karzai shrewdly turned Washington's disenchantment with him to his political advantage by portraying himself as independent from American tentacles. His advertised freedom from being under Uncle Sam's thumb played well among certain Afghan constituencies.<sup>115</sup> The Kabul government's policy prescriptions and actions hint at future political friction between international COIN forces and the host government. Both the Afghan and Philippine cases demonstrated the political vulnerability of the Indirect Approach, when the host country decides to take a political course that runs counter to American efforts to eradicate potential threats. It is a lesson worthy of remembering when implementing the Indirect Approach, so a doctrine does not evolve into a dogma undermining our future security.

## Some Observations

History never lays out a clear guide path for future courses of action. But past experiences can illuminate our insight while raising red lanterns toward reflexive applications of complex and dependent COIN strategies. Vietnam, Somalia, and the Philippines vary widely in historical, cultural, and political circumstances. These facts alone caution COIN practitioners about the universality of any doctrine rigidly applied to win peace and stability against wily extremists. Implementing a doctrine, perfected or tested in

one country, will require adjustments and well-thought-out plans to avoid pitfalls in another landscape. At this juncture, American attention is focused largely on Afghanistan and Pakistan and directed to a lesser degree toward the Philippines, the Horn of Africa, and more recently, Yemen. In each of these battlegrounds against extremists, the insurgencies differ as did the COIN responses.

Of these theaters, U.S. COIN in Afghanistan is presently characterized by American and NATO troops doing the lion's share of the fighting rather than having the practical option to utilize surrogate warfare to a significant extent. The short-term objective is to buy the Afghan people time and space to build an indigenous security force capable of directly taking on the Taliban

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with the Coalition eventually playing an "overwatch" role. The large-scale U.S. profile provides less than optimum conditions for Indirect Approach. First, current tactical practices, as noted above, place U.S. troops in greater danger as they strive to protect civilians by abstaining from airstrikes and artillery bombardments. Second, the overrepresentation of U.S. and NATO units (as compared to Afghan forces) reinforces the Taliban claim of a foreign occupation. Under ideal circumstances, the Coalition presence would be small, low visibility, and arm's-length. Yet, without the build-up of foreign Coalition troops, the insurgents had turned the battle tide in their favor by mid-2009. The U.S. surge of 30,000 American troops and NATO reinforcements in 2010 shifted the momentum back to the Coalition side.

The large-scale U.S. and NATO combat presence has another drawback. It is feared the robust Coalition deployment induces a dependency by the Karzai government and its security forces on the outside army. The Kabul authority's role looms large in securing and administering the newly liberated towns and lands from the Taliban. It constitutes a litmus test for the Indirect Approach, especially with President Barack Obama's mandated start date for the withdrawal of some U.S. troops in July 2011. Becoming dependent on the United States for security and governance was the chief worry by the American ambassador in the period before the White House announced its surge strategy. In November 2009, Karl W. Eikenberry cabled

Washington that the Karzai government “continues to shun responsibility for any sovereign burden, whether defense, governance or development.” The envoy added that the Afghan president and his circle “do not want the U.S. to leave and are only too happy to see us invest further.”<sup>116</sup> Other problems bedeviled the Indirect Approach.

The prevalent charges of financial corruption in government affairs and voting fraud in the 20 August 2009 election damage the legitimacy of President Karzai and undercut the Indirect Approach, which strives to strengthen and work through a credible government. It is a factor largely beyond the control of SOF and other ground forces that, as noted above, cannot choose their host government. Yet their indirect mission depends on perceptions by the indigenous people about the role of American forces in their nation’s governance.

Afghanistan, in addition, has not witnessed a seamless coordination between the host government and American commanders on anti-insurgency operations. Their views on COIN operations reflected differences of opinion and political perceptions. President Karzai has, as noted above, criticized U.S. conduct of the war. He has also interfered with its implementation. Against their professional judgment, senior U.S. officers reportedly granted Karzai’s request to dispatch temporarily a rifle company to defend Barge Matal, a remote village high in Nurestan province bordering Pakistan in July 2009. Located on the southern slopes of the Hindu Kush peaks of northeastern Afghanistan, the tiny community lay beyond the U.S. defense-of-communities game plan. The American military officials, in fact, had planned to pull back from under-populated terrain so as to concentrate on safeguarding larger populations in the lowlands. When the outpost at Barge Matal was finally abandoned 2 months later, it led to friction with Afghan government officials, who encountered political problems when territory fell to the Taliban. As Army Colonel Randy George was quoted: “We’ve learned that there is a political component” to firebase closures.<sup>117</sup> The politicized nature of the Indirect Approach translates into myriad political ramifications that bode ill for even tactical gains against the insurgency.

The other contested countries see various applications of the Indirect Approach. In Pakistan, American advisors are training Islamabad’s troops to fight Taliban insurgents in that country’s northwestern areas. In the Horn and in the Philippines, SOF are playing a well-executed indirect role to preempt a full-blown insurgency by transferring COIN techniques to



local African forces and the Filipino army. A similar thing can be said of the U.S. efforts in Yemen. Their low-profile role takes advantage of the most ideal conditions to operationalize training and readying missions against sputtering insurgencies. The intense Afghan insurgency currently precludes a similar indirect role for U.S. and NATO troops. An “awakening” phenomenon will not spread on its own; it must be protected and nurtured to life in traumatized Afghanistan.

The main shortcoming in the application of the Indirect Approach lies not at the tactical level, where SOF and other U.S. forces interact with the local population. Here language and customs compel the adaptation of COIN guidelines, but the fundamentals endure to protect and to win over the population and deny its complicity with the insurgents. At a higher level, however, the Indirect Approach faces uncertainties that are reflected in the case studies within this monograph. The Vietnam War witnessed the local success of the Montagnard village defense forces in limiting Viet Cong penetration in their precincts. As outlined above, the mobilization of the Montagnards, however, strengthened their ethno-nationalism against the U.S.-allied South Vietnamese government, making it difficult to integrate the hill peoples’ units into Saigon’s armed forces. Iraq beheld again the difficulties of integrating the “awakening” militias into the national armed forces dominated by Shiite officers and officials. Similar manifestations of ethnic autonomy and resistance to the central government’s authority are present in Afghanistan between the majority Pashtuns (who fill the Taliban ranks) and Tajiks (who back the Kabul government). While these expressions of separatism existed before the current-day conflicts, the demands of the Indirect Approach, as noted, can exacerbate ethnic-nationalism, creating problems for national unity. Even when ethnic animosities are mostly absent, the establishment of local power centers could prove divisive. Such an outcome can confound the seamless implementation of the Indirect Approach.

Afghanistan in early 2010 witnessed a public pause in the setting up of pro-government militias or the strengthening of existing local units to confront the Taliban. Formed on their own or with assistance from Special Forces, the grass-roots groups were seen as a means to bring security to villages, where the Afghan army and police were too weak or too distrusted for the self-defense mission. This plan, endorsed by General McChrystal, called for taking advantage of informal security organizations springing up

in villages. To some observers, the village program resembled the Sons of Iraq (or the Awakening Councils) in Iraq. But distinctions are present in the Afghan version. Since weapons pervade across the mountainous country, American forces had no need to furnish arms to villagers. Money provided by SOF went to village development projects, not to individual militiamen. Special Forces instructed villagers and handed out radios to them for emergency calls to regular Afghan forces. In some instances, the grass-roots forces were placed under the command of local *shura*, or council of elders, rather than a tribal headman to avoid spawning another crop of warlords.<sup>118</sup>

This program, known as the Local Defense Initiative, was temporarily suspended by U.S. Ambassador Eikenberry and top Afghan government officials out of fear that it was creating a new breed of warlords. Ruthless warlords had been a scourge of contemporary Afghan society especially after the Red Army vacated in 1989. The suspension worked against COIN efforts, however. U.S. military commanders and local Afghan officials saw militiamen as a first line of defense in the outlying countryside. The Indirect Approach to organize sub-national self-defense units against the Taliban was thus temporarily placed on hold. In November 2009, Hanif Atmar, the Afghan Interior Minister, said in an interview that a few militia commanders acquired too much power. Atmar contended in the northern city of Kunduz that militia leaders “became the power and they took money and collected taxes from the people” after expelling the Taliban. He added: “this is not legal, and this is warlordism.”<sup>119</sup> American embassy officials called for more central government control of the Local Defense Initiative, lest the project foster decentralization and local chiefdoms.

Yet U.S. military officers remained committed to community-level organizations, because most Afghans regarded the Kabul government as corrupt, inefficient, and a danger to the village tribal structure. They viewed the bottoms-up approach as the only viable one in a fractured and war-torn society with a long history of distant and ineffectual central authority.<sup>120</sup> The dispute—one of many between State and Defense—was resolved in the military’s favor, but it hammered smooth execution of the Indirect Approach.

Just a few years ago, early approaches in Somalia fell well short of expectations. First, in what was tantamount to a counterterrorist operation, CIA agents pursued Al Qaeda affiliated terrorists. The CIA support for the warlords to track down the terror fugitives, in reality, played into the hands of extremist militias who rallied Somalis to their cause against the pervasive

lawlessness of warlord authority. Second, the Pentagon's fall-back strategy resorted to bolstering the Ethiopian intervention to oust the ICU from power in Mogadishu. This haphazard version of the Indirect Approach represented a desperate throw of the dice. Little else would have halted the extremists in their march to destroy the TFG and with it any hope of a moderate regime in Somalia. In the short term it worked, but in the longer term it backfired. The Ethiopian invasion and occupation rekindled Somali revulsion against their foreign overlords and enhanced the spread of an even more virulent extremism as manifested by the al-Sahaab militias. At least U.S. policy-makers decided pragmatically in realigning American support to Somali figures. Today the militants threaten America's current ruling partner. The reputedly moderate Ahmed, as noted above, succeeded in galvanizing and coalescing his extremist enemies, who denounced him as a mere U.S. tool. At least for now the Ahmed government serves as an unsteady bulwark against true-believing insurgents.

Finally, the Philippines, in many respects a showcase of the Indirect Approach, falls short of being a universal model. In the Sulu Archipelago the American role is a discreet training operation accompanied by sharing intelligence and by civic action ventures more along the lines of a FID mission than a full-blown COIN operation.<sup>121</sup> Moreover, the Philippines' long-lived political and personal interactions with the United States preclude it from being a one-size-fits-all blueprint. This intertwined history has also witnessed periods of Manila's rejection and expulsion of the American military presence on its soil, which could portend a renewed bout of anti-Americanism. Another recurrence might jeopardize the current favorable prospects of the Indirect Approach in the archipelago. The recent proposed transfer of territory on Mindanao Island to the separatist MILF, which reportedly colluded with the Al Qaeda-linked Abu Sayyaf, once again demonstrates that political decisions above the tactical level can adversely impact a sound application of the Indirect Approach. Manila's historic neglect of the 30 percent Muslim minority in Mindanao is better overcome with economic development and representational political integration. The United States has moved to provide more assistance to the long-impooverished area. To date, Washington channeled more than \$500 million in security assistance to Manila since the signing of the VFA in 2000.<sup>122</sup> Astute economic and political actions from Manila can only complement the U.S. Indirect Approach to the extremists'

insurgency. But should the Manila government veer from a sound political course, it would compromise the Indirect Approach.

A final and crucial point about the Indirect Approach centers on its cost-effectiveness ratio. To date, the United States and its allies have expended vastly disproportionate funds on the insurgency battlegrounds when compared with the extremists. These expenditures have been highest in Iraq and Afghanistan. But the costs are also nontrivial in the Horn of African and Philippines when combined with smaller U.S. deployments elsewhere. Al Qaeda calculates it can “open new fronts” in order “to exhaust America economically.” By creating safe havens, the terrorist network strategizes that it can do to the United States what the mujahideen did to the Soviet Union during the 1980s—bleed it to death economically. Humbling the Soviet superpower in Afghanistan two decades ago sustains extremists today in the belief that they can repeat history through opening many safe havens or insurgent fronts.<sup>123</sup> An astute counterinsurgent policy must reckon with and defeat this protracted-conflict stratagem. Costs and cost-effectiveness, therefore, will need to be part of the Indirect Approach calculus. It is the hypothesis of this monograph that only a calibrated and carefully executed Indirect Approach can spare the United States from financial insolvency and political exhaustion in combating the spreading of terrorist-inspired insurgencies around the globe.

America confronts a global gathering storm from insurgent-based and ideologically fueled terrorism. The Indirect Approach is an important initiative to check or defeat extremist-inspired insurgencies in several theaters. In addition to the countries noted in this monograph, others—including Yemen, Colombia, and Mauritania—have budding insurgencies. The Indirect Approach to helping our partners to combat extremist insurgencies is the only realistic policy at hand. Its inherent vulnerabilities, such as the dependence on mediocre host governments or volatile internal circumstances, demand frank acknowledgement, however. The strategy cannot be an automatic substitute on its own for SOF and regular U.S. forces when only direct intervention preserves or safeguards American lives and interests. America’s security cannot be outsourced and dependent on others. How the Indirect Approach is implemented, with thoughtfulness and subtlety, remains an overarching objective. Dogmatic applications of a doctrine do it great disservice, perhaps leading to defeat. ↑

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